

Weekly Reading, Posted December 28, 2009

At the cusp here. Writing in 2009 for Sunday, January 3, 2010, aka "The Second Sunday of Christmas." Considerations of the meaning and power of the incarnation continue, with Epiphany just over the horizon on January 6. I imagine some congregations/ preachers will chose the Epiphany lessons for this Sunday, but I will go with Christmas II. But in these lessons, a whole lotta good news.

Jeremiah 31: 7 - 14

From that part of the book of Jeremiah referred to as "The Book of Consolation." God, who scattered, will gather his people. God who exiled, will bring his people home. "I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow." (verse 13) Christmas is a sort of consolation, as is the Incarnation itself a turning of God towards us in love and mercy. Less theologically, perhaps, these words assure us that bad times don't last forever, that sorrow too has its season but lifts and clears. There are new beginnings, home-comings, seasons of grace. Sometimes (always?) in the midst of down or hard or sad times, it seems that they will never end. It's not true. Change, salvations great and small, do come to us. A child is born unto you!

Ephesians 1: 3 - 14

More good news! God, Paul tells the congregation at Ephesus, has chosen you, called you, claimed you and will keep you and uphold you. Note: God is the subject of the verbs. God has redeemed, forgiven, lavished, revealed, chosen. So often, preachers make humans the subjects of all the verbs, saying what we have done, should do, shouldn't do, ought to do and on and on. Paul never starts there, but always with what God has done on our behalf in Jesus Christ. Such is the difference between news, good news, and good advice. We need more good news, less good advice.

John 1: (1 - 9) 10 - 18

And yet more good news! Though not unmitigated. Somber notes are sounded. "He came to his own and his own did not receive him." And yet it returns quickly to good news, "But to all who received him he gave power to become children of God." So, there is massive continuity between the three lessons for Christmas II. God has done a new thing. All things have been made new. There is a new beginning. As this is the majestic prologue to John's gospel, so all three lessons seem a prologue, possibly, to a new year. In all three lessons the source of the new creation is not us, but God. God has sent life and light. On one hand, this butts up against our human stuckness and the difficulty we find in changing. On the other, change is possible when something has happened, someone has come, to shift everything. Change does come, not because the calendar turns and a new year begins, but because God is making all things new. In the UCC Still Speaking Devotional for today I ponder the mixed meanings of the words "born again." On one hand, they become a slogan and an ideology. On the other, they speak promising truth and life. If you don't get those daily devotions but would like to, go to the "Columnist" page at this website, where you will find directions for

signing up, or simply go to www.ucc.org and locate "Daily Devotional" on the homepage. You can sign up from there.