



REVIVAL II

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, August 22, 2010

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Lection - Job 5:8-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 8) As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. (v. 9) He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. (v. 10) He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; (v. 11) he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. (v. 12) He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. (v. 13) He takes the wise in their own craftiness; and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. (v. 14) They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope at noonday as in the night. (v. 15) But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth, from the hand of the mighty. (v. 16) So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

The subject of focus for Revival I (last Sunday's Lectionary unit) was *leaving our children a holy inheritance that would make them good stewards of the faith*. Today's Revival unit has as its focus *making a commitment to keep God as our source of hope regardless of our financial state and the state of the world*. For those who tend to preach three or more days of revival, we hope that we have provided you adequate foundation upon which to build a powerful period of preaching and teaching beginning with these scriptures to which you can easily add.

Revival I and II have in common the necessity for us to hold firmly to and live out our faith. These are two sides of the same coin.¹ This strand (holding firmly/living out) runs through today's and last Sunday's lection.

In Colonial America, there was the field preaching of circuit riders and traveling evangelists. This was the means by which the gospel reached the enslaved African and whites on the frontier. One of the most well-known among this group was a white evangelist, George Whitefield. For the entire antebellum period there were great restrictions on African Americans, and in many states they were forbidden to preach at all. Among early African American preachers who were allowed to travel and preach as evangelists were Harry Hoosier, Richard Allen and Andrew Bryan.

Many churches continue to schedule these "meetings" during what is called the Revival Season. Most often churches hold either Spring and Fall revivals or one yearly revival. This allows people in a given area to go from one church to the next and hear what is considered the "best preaching" to be found. Preachers gifted in oratory and "telling the story" are summoned to reach into the hearts and souls of the people so churches will be stirred for the work of the ministry. Some preachers travel on what is called a "Revival Circuit" that takes them across large regions of the country and even other parts of the world. For some, it is their primary vocation.

Revival preaching in the black church often has two main purposes: (1) reinvigorating and renewing the existing body of Christ; and, (2) over a sustained period, inviting those who have strayed from the fold and those who have not accepted God as their complete source of hope to join with a specific band of believers, as they all live out their commitment to God through service. It is a time of spiritual cleansing and healing.

With Revival being such a staple of spiritual life in African American churches, people expect it. In many churches it is preceded by a time of prayer, preparation and even evangelism. In such instances it is like a spiritual oasis; it is respite and refreshment from the routines and rigors of daily life. When done well the preaching is of a quality perhaps not heard on a regular basis.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Job 5:8-16

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

We live in a time when too many have fallen in love with the gospel of Job's friends. They preach and flock to preaching that extols health, wealth, and prosperity, even to the point of positing flaws in the faith of those who are sick, poor, or not aggressive in the pursuit of wealth. In the preoccupation with striving, the danger is gaining the world at the expense of marriages, families and communities. Commitment to the good of others has become passé. Some are gaining the world and losing their souls. In all too many cases it seems that the god being served is mammon.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Look at what Eliphaz has to say to Job, who insisted on his righteousness before God. He and his friends had spun a web of logic out of their theology, which was steeped in the wisdom of their time. Their perspective was that when you do right you prosper, and when there is lack of prosperity—or even worse, suffering—this is a sign of your sin. Satan used similar logic in the Job story. Indeed, his challenge to God was that since Job served God because God blessed him, the hedge God had around Job should be removed to see if Job would serve without prosperity. The devil expressed that he believed Job would curse God to God's face once he was poor and sick.

In our text, Eliphaz is rebuking Job. He reminded Job of the good works he has seen in him, and asserted that there must have been some departure from the ways of righteousness so characteristic of him. To Eliphaz, Job has panicked at the very time he should have been searching his heart. If he were in Job's condition, he would seek God to find out what he had done to grieve the Almighty, whose works are inscrutable. Eliphaz extolled the goodness of God, who gives rain across the land and sends water to the countryside. God raises what is gloomy to safety and frustrates the schemes of the shrewd. God traps the wise in their cunning, rescues the poor from the sword, gives hope, comes to the aid of the weak and makes injustice shut its mouth.

Job never cursed God, but he cursed the day he was born, requesting that it be returned to the void from which it emerged. Crying out his wish that he had been stillborn, he demanded that God come to his defense. Job's discourse was rude and bellicose. He was testy with friends who had pronounced the only theology they knew. And yet God proved them wrong in defending Job. However, in addition to defending Job, God compelled him to pray for his friends and offer sacrifice for them. God also challenged Job for speaking out of turn and without wisdom.

Revival for Job was being called out before God and stripped of his presumptuous posture. Deep down, he had accepted the theology of his friends, taken his wealth as the badge of his righteousness, and presumed to demand God's appearance in his defense. God forced Job to acknowledge that he was never in a position to make such demands. God came as a whirlwind, to press the case for divine sovereignty, and demand that Job stand in utter respect and awe before God. His duty—yea, his privilege was to offer worship in spite of the circumstances in which he found himself.¹

The time does come when we stand face to face with God. Then we know God for ourselves. At that moment we will not be saved by our possessions; we will not be saved by our claims that we are righteous. We will only have our faith in the Holy God to bring before God. This is what we must hold on to. A revival song said it this way: I'm holding, I'm just holding on. I'm holding on and I won't let go my faith.

Celebration

True revival may well be a return to the devotion and consecration that enables us to cherish the life of the righteous ones, even if poor. But more, it is to learn how material blessings, positions, knowledge, and expertise provide the occasions to bless those whom Jesus called blessed—even if they do not have material signs of the same. At the very least, true revival is honest about and expresses the tension that lies between the two moments.²

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sights: Rain, fields being watered; the lowly being raised, the mournful being lifted to safety; the crafty being frustrated; darkness during the day; a person groping at noontime as if in a room of darkness; swords; injustice with its mouth closed; and

Sounds: The sound of rain; a person knocking over items as they group in darkness; and injustice shutting its mouth.

III. Other Sermonic Comments

- Daniel Berrigan in his commentary on Job says of this passage ... “Eliphaz stands with a God whose creation is a system humming with rational energy.” The system as he defines it is, “A complex mechanism of reward and punishment, in consequence of good deeds or ill. Job, too bad for him... hardly to be thought secure, or in place. Nor is he likely consoled by the God of Eliphaz, or by his systematic universe, ticking away, exact and exacting, a kind of supernal Swiss timepiece.”³
- Conversion experiences in revivals often paralleled religious encounters in West African cultures. Elaborate accounts were often required before the testimony of one's conversion was bonafide. Such accounts were often the key to a testimony that gave confidence to the community that one had been refashioned in the presence and image of God. The testimony was crucial for having “know-so salvation,” and being fit to preach or give leadership.

The lyrics, “...Sinner please don't let this harvest pass...” reflect a moment of sincere pleading that characterized the atmosphere at the mourner's bench and the

tarry meeting. It was rooted in the sense of when one was near the point of great spiritual triumph, but for lack of persistence could revert to a state of losing their gain. Even worse, was plunging into a deeper state of spiritual despair. There is ample testimony from the mouths of many to the transforming moment that can never be forgotten. This is true in a special way for those who experienced spiritual filling, a calling, or deliverance from bondage. The moment that marked the identity made the ultimate difference.

- Revival is a moment of potential for great benefit, but also for great waste. Done poorly, revivals can be an utter and complete waste. In those cases they reduce to "... bodily exercise that profits little." This is where they have no purpose and leave no lasting benefit. There is good singing, shouting, dancing, speaking, and other performances. The sermon primarily is entertainment—full of sound and fury, tuning, whooping, paroxysms, gyration that amount to little or nothing. The preacher "cuts through the cornfield" with incoherent babbling that strings along homespun wit or stories, waiting for the people to become excited. This is little more than a moment for escape from the trouble of the world, but without a sense of how empowerment is for return to the world of struggle and witness. There is no comment on the current crises, and no direction for how to be a faithful witness. There may be considered commentary on personal sins, but there is no perspective on national or social sin. Put another way, there is no critique of the theology of Job's friends. We leave just like we came. The worst part of all is when we do it all in the name of Jesus.
- Optimum preparation is rooted in sound exegesis and contains theological and contextual analysis. It is prophetic. That is, it prosecutes personal disobedience, negligence, and irresponsibility. But it also prosecutes the nations—including our own—for crimes against God and the people. It discloses evil schemes in the political, social, and economic arena that brings on suffering. Indeed, it discloses where Satan's throne is. It revisited by the very purpose of the church as God's witness and instrument in the world. As ecumenical events, revivals can provide for fellowship with believers not seen on a regular basis, and afford the moment to cross denominational and other lines of division. City Wide or regional revivals allow for visiting other churches and seeing how ministry is done by other Christians. In this regard, there are any number of convocations and conferences that serve a purpose similar to the traditional revival.
- Revivals can provide moments in which communities can be healed of lingering wounds and festering antagonisms. It can spark commitment to the ministries of the church. In short, done well, revival can supply the unction for fuller embrace of our heritage.

Revivals also can provide opportunities for the individual and the Church to examine and repair their personal areas of individual and corporate disunity and weakness—those failings that hinder their spiritual growth. They can be moments for bodily healing, restoration of marriages, spiritual refilling, an endowment of

charisms for ministry.

Notes

1. Good, Edwin. In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.
2. Welch, L. H. Hell Without Fire. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002; Blasimgame, John. Slave Community. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979.
3. Berrigan, Daniel. Job. Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2000.