

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Oct 13th 2014

Our readings for today challenge us to look at the legitimacy of who we are and what is expected of us because of that. We are people of “the promise.” While Abraham has two “sets” of descendants, it is only those descended from Isaac who have the legitimacy to be free as a result of the covenant with God and Abraham. The miracle of Isaac’s birth to a barren mother was a sign of the covenant – a promise made good. Paul is emphasizing that similarly, following Christ also sets us free. The other part of that original “deal” was to live according to God’s rules – we haven’t been so good about that. . . We want to have the benefits of the legitimate son (Isaac) and the promise but want to live by our own rules. So now Paul is telling us, we have the opportunity to be “free” again because of the promise of this Son. But . . . we must “stand firm.”

That brings us to the gospel and the point that Jesus is trying to make with the crowd. They kept asking for a sign and He (the sign) was right there. Jesus referred to Jonah and his connection with the Ninevites – not being a scholar of the Old Testament, I had to go back and read about this part as well to fully understand. Unfortunately (at least for me), much of the New Testament refers back to events and promises of the Old Testament. The crowds listening, undoubtedly, understood better these references. Jonah did preach repentance to those in Ninevah (the capitol of Assyria and enemy of Israel) fully expecting them to ignore him and then be destroyed by God (thus preventing them from attacking Israel). Much to his chagrin and surprise, they did repent and were spared. Jonah’s concern was not imagined – the newly repented and now stronger Ninevites were able to conquer Israel. As I tried to make sense of this, it reminded me of a Sunday gospel a couple of weeks ago. Two sons were asked to work, one said no but actually did work, the other said yes but did not hold true to his commitment. I think that is what we are hearing in these readings. We are called and have the opportunity but if we pass it by, it will be provided to others. The Israelites said yes, but didn’t do what was expected. The Ninevites originally said no (in the way they lived and sinned) yet in the end they repented – so their actions were yes. Actions do speak louder than words!

The first part of the gospel could be directed at us right now: “This generation is an evil generation . . .” We sometimes mouth the words that indicate “yes” but live our lives as a “no.” We have been offered a great gift – God’s grace – but like the guests who didn’t show up to the wedding, others will take our place and our gift. We have the chance to change our lives as did the Ninevites and, with that change, to be victorious.

Nancy Shirley - Creighton's Collaborative Ministry Office