

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

Teens and Cell Phones

45% (11 million) of American teens own a cell phone, according to a recent Pew Foundation survey. 33% use them for text messaging and increasingly as personal computers. But topping the cell is online instant messaging- it is the method of communication for teens. 90% of all 13-21 year olds use IM according to AOL. That is nine out of every ten teens! Even signing a Year Book is now a matter of writing a "screen name" under the photo. All of this includes Christian kids. The teen who writes the Teen Scene column in our newspaper here says that laptops, cell-phones, iPods, Online instant messaging and cell phone text messaging "are a necessity to our lives- placed just above eating and below breathing on the list of life's essentials." Can a Christian teen seriously mean that? I know Christian adults who might say that. They must have the latest tech gadgets. I am absolutely not one of them. This computer in front of me is my typewriter. That's it. Many Pastors and churches love, value highly and eagerly use, the latest technology, for the Lord's work, of course. I can't understand how I have lived a lifetime and have had a long career of Ministry without today's popular must have gadgets. Truthfully, I do not see that its use today has greatly improved the Lord's work. It has certainly not made us more holy or righteous, God filled or more loving. Anyway, here is an excellent article, with a lot of good links on the subject of Christians and popular technology- <http://www.ctlibrary.com/32386>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 12:42

Advice for Bible Study from a Comic Strip

One of the best "comic strips" is "For Better or Worse" (actually, more like an illustrated novel, a burgeoning literary art form. In fact, this genre was fully explained in another recent "comic strip" series: Funky Winkerbean. They are not the "funnies") Today's entry has an English teacher giving a writing assignment to her students. These are what she wants them to look for and put into a "Book Report" for class. Predominant Theme: what was the writer trying to say. Analysis of Story Development- separate main plot from subplots. List Outstanding Characters- establish their relevance to the story. What Elements were used- where was the tension, where was the turning point and what was the ultimate resolution. Good advice for reviewing any narrative book. A lot of "Bible Study" would be improved greatly, if folks followed the same formula when they approach the narrative portions of Scripture.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 11:59

Fatal Attractions

The story yesterday and this morning about the young teen who died because she was kissed by a boy who had just eaten peanut butter was particularly meaningful to us, because it comes too close to home. One of our grandchildren also has severe, life-threatening reactions to peanuts and has had close calls, needing to be rushed for life saving emergency treatment. Many people are indifferent, even ridicule, the problem. Hopefully, this tragic experience in the news will educate and alert people to the reality of the danger of food allergies. And other kinds, too. I am very allergic to many corn products and have been very thankful to folks who have accommodated me on that, when being their guest for a meal. I am especially allergic to chemical odors and have severe seizure-like episodes, if I am not careful. This is a constant battle, as chemical fragrances are everywhere, including in church. Perfumes, colognes and aftershave lotions make me sick. So do molds and musty odors and the smell of the glue under new carpeting. And there are the fragrances of potpourri and candles that seem to be every where. Allergies are a serious problem and I am thankful the public is becoming aware. I am very sad for the the 14 year old and her family- actually hundreds die every year and innumerable others become very sick from allergies. If we Christians are into loving and caring for others, and we are, we need to include being sensitive about people who are sensitive to chemicals (including food additives). As they say, it can be a matter of life and breath.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:36

The First Special day in the New Church Year

John 1:35-42 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter). The first "Day" of the new Church Year (which began last Sunday) commemorates [today] the Apostle Andrew. He is especially remembered for introducing his brother to Jesus. That is a great statement: "He brought Simon to Jesus" and we know the rest of that story. The New Year begins with a Day focused on personal evangelism. In reading this familiar passage, I am struck this time around with the pre-evangelism involved. Andrew was influenced by the teaching and witness of John the Baptist. Andrew had learned from John and others about the coming "Lamb of God". That phrase and the Bible Doctrine and Prophecy behind it was familiar to Andrew before he personally met Jesus. Likewise with the title and prophetic work of "Messiah"- familiar not only to Andrew, but to Peter, as well. I am mindful that these men were Jews and knew their Bible from childhood, before coming to know Jesus personally. There is a lesson here, not only about evangelism, but about the importance of what used to be called Sunday School (now something called Spiritual Formation) More than all this, however, is the Gospel Writer's translation/explanation for his non Jewish readers, of the Hebrew titles, and therefore, the concepts. This passage can be used, not only to encourage personal evangelism, but pre-evangelism, using both Bible teaching for church people (especially children) and contextualizing that same teaching for non-church people, making it understandable to them, in terms that they know and use outside of a church context.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 10:09

Tuesday, November 29, 2005

What Should I Do?

I have been struggling again today with focusing on what I am trying to do these days and explaining that to friends who express interest. This Sunday is sign-up-for-a-ministry day at the church we attend (Stewardship Sunday). We frequently are asked about joining the Choir or teaching Sunday School. My wife also is asked to join the Women's Group. I occasionally have felt a desire to return to the pastorate or to start a new church. Some of our friends here are very much into urban ministry, meaning working with and for the "poor" in the inner city. They always need extra hands. We are almost done with the Course in Genesis that I have been leading on Monday nights. Besides my wife and I, there have been 5 faithful adults who have stuck with it and now we need to decide whether to go on with the next Course. The first one is pre-requisite for the second, so no new people can be added, even if they could be found. (The two courses are actually the two halves of one course)The pastorate and becoming involved in a local church are no longer options for me. I am not called to inner city work. Been there and done all of that most of my adult life. The Course and my envisioned Institute remain serious options. Psalm 146 explains-

Alleluia! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. This is what I will do. Seeing God glorified is my passion. After all these years in ministry, this is more primary and pressing to me than church work or soup kitchens. Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, for there is no help in them. When they breathe their last, they return to earth, and in that day their thoughts perish. My faith and hope for seeing the Kingdom of God come does not rest in rulers of any kind, nor in government or church politics and programs. Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! whose hope is in the Lord their God; Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; who keeps his promise for ever; Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous; the Lord cares for the stranger; he sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked. God will bring in His Kingdom. Ours is to focus on Him- to shout from the housetop: Behold your God! When rulers and all people, rich and poor, do that- Justice will flow like a river and churches will be the churches He has always intended them to be. The Lord shall reign for ever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Alleluia!

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 18:50

Monday, November 28, 2005

Confronting Social Issues

Every day, I read about social problems and problems in our nation and world. It can be overwhelming and depressing. One solution to that, adopted by many, is not to read the papers or to read, but then setting the news aside and simply going about business, ignoring these matters. I can not do that. Violence and Poverty and Corruption and War and Disasters can not be ignored. They only get worse. I realize these are complicated issues. Celebrities singing about them and activists displaying bumper stickers and every one calling every one else "names" just does not solve anything. Certainly throwing money at the problems has never solved them in the long run- in fact, that has often made many problems worse. I see these matters, at root, as spiritual problems, requiring spiritual solutions. Many undoubtedly will laugh out loud at that. The following five posts taken together suggest an outline to use in coming to terms with social issues in the long term. Please read them from top down and all together.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 16:32

Being truly "Radical"- going to the "root" of Social Problems

All evangelical Christians believe human beings are sinners and that is because we have a "fallen", sinful nature tracing back to Adam & Eve's sin in Eden. Problems in society, from violence and crime to divorce to child abuse to racism and poverty, are all attributed to this drive, within each of us, to sin. Social problems, it is believed, are really, at root, personal and individual problems. This is not the whole truth. Most evangelical Christians seem to have a difficult time recognizing that the problems of our society (and world) are also rooted in the institutions and structures of society. The problems are a combination of these structures and our fallen human nature. And that combination is complicated because each feeds off the other. Solutions require confronting and changing both. One Christian, who reacted negatively when he heard in a sermon what I have just written, is a dairy farmer. He agreed with the traditional evangelical view of social problems being problems caused by sinful individuals; but increasingly he spent his time combating what he saw as threats to his farm business and family welfare from government farm policies and various national and regional agricultural interest groups and organizations- not simply individuals. The issues were not considered sins by him, but were "wrongs" and injustices being wrought against family farmers like him. I mention him, solid Christian that he is, not to criticize him and his very legitimate concerns; but, because he really illustrates the problem I am writing about: we value individualism and personal freedoms, but the reality is that we live within systems and structures. And Scripture is clear- all of our institutions from marriage to church to government (including farm policies and foreign policies) can be taken over by evil spiritual powers.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 16:20

Structures and Idols

Our world is full of injustice: oppression, exploitation, greed leading to fraud and robbery, defamation and acts of inhumanity, violence, even genocide. These evils are often systemic, institutionalized and manifest in the actions of corporations and governments. This is clear teaching of Scripture and yet most (?) evangelical Christians believe that change in society requires, and will only result from, change in individuals; which results, in turn, from entering into a "personal" relationship with Jesus. Not so. And what is behind structural evil or sin? Idolatry- the worship and service of God-substitutes. Evangelicals will agree that personal sins such as selfishness, greed, lust, pride, laziness [the "works of the flesh"] are real; but, they rarely give any consideration to the reality and evil of idolatry. And what is behind Idolatry? False concepts about Reality, about Truth: about God. Human beings have been deceived, led into error and falsehood in all the basic beliefs that influence how they live, including personal morality. People buy into Error about what really counts and what really satisfies and thus create idols to meet their assumed needs. Where do these illusions come from? Evil spiritual powers that are, by definition, against God and Christ.

Posted by Cal at 16:13

The Four Roots of Social Problems

When we look at society and its problems, people who know their Bibles, will recognize we are dealing with four "Roots"-1. Fallen human nature2. Fallen spiritual powers3. Structures and institutions under the control of Fallen Powers4. Idolatry inspired by Fallen PowersEvangelicals rightly believe that the death of Jesus was a full atonement for the individual sins of all people ("Jesus died for me!")Evangelicals must enlarge their understanding of the Cross- realize that it has a far greater scope than they have usually been taught. The cross was the defeat of the Powers. The resurrection was Christ's triumph over them. Evangelicals must also recognize that Scripture declares Christ is now a reigning Sovereign [the meaning of Ascension Day, neglected by most evangelical churches]. They believe that Jesus is Lord, but limit His Lordship to their personal lives. Christ is Lord over all or He is not Lord at all. He rose to be Lord over our personal lives, yes; but, also over the structures and institutions of our society- yes, over the nations of the world. Evangelicals must reject the unscriptural doctrine that the Kingdom will come, but only after the so-called Rapture. They must reject the Doctrine that says that the Kingdom now is strictly spiritual, -in our hearts. Later, some day, after the Rapture, it will be physical and material. Not so. Jesus announced the Presence of the Kingdom on earth in his person and ministry, greatly expanded at Pentecost and growing at this very moment, to be completed at His second coming in glory.

Posted by Cal at 16:10

The Gospel is Good News about Four Things-

1. God entered the world in the person of Jesus. God's Reign on earth, in person, had begun in the Life and Work of Jesus2. God Himself, in the person of His Son, by his death, made atonement sufficient for the sin of the world and efficient for the salvation of the Elect.3. God in the person of His Son, by his resurrection, triumphed over His enemies: the Fallen Powers, including Satan and Death. They are defeated.4. The resurrected Son of God, by his ascension to the Throne of God, now reigns in Heaven and on earth as the Lord of all. Where is the Church that preaches all this? The Gospel preached in churches today almost always focuses on the individual- his personal sin, Jesus' sacrifice for him personally, his personal Salvation. While important, this version of the Gospel greatly misses the mark. It misses the extent of the problem and omits most of what God has done about it. It is time to correct this omission.

Posted by Cal at 16:06

What is the Biblical Approach to Social Problems?

There are many, many organizations and agencies, faith-based and secular, doing Common Grace Work- trying, and succeeding to various degrees, to "make a difference" in the world- teaching, training, mentoring, employing, housing, feeding, healing, reconciling, community building, sheltering, counseling, etc- doing good things for and with people in need. All of them fall short of what must be done. Scripture calls for four actions-Proclamation of the full [the four points above] Gospel, with the prayer and expectation that God will use the hearing of it to affect personal regeneration, turning them from the Darkness to the LightIntercession, especially for opportunities to share the Gospel effectivelyConfrontation of the Powers & Idols of our Times (that includes various forms of Totalitarianism Left and Right, Technicism, Mammonism, and Philosophical Naturalism) with the Gospel and Biblical Truth, countering Error and Deception in the minds of peopleDemonstration: Regenerated People living the Truth together (a church), demonstrating freedom from the dominion of the Powers and Idols of our Times I'm glad there are Common Grace Ministries out there, but the glory of God and actual, long-range changes in our society requires all of these four essentials. Otherwise, any change is limited to individuals and only for a time.

Posted by Cal at 16:04

Intelligent Design?

Key to the current debate in the courts over the teaching of I.D., particularly now in Dover, Delaware, is the book Of Pandas and People. It is published by the Foundation for Thought and Ethics Check out their website for more information about them and their books.

<http://www.fteonline.com/index.htm>A common ploy used by Darwinists against ID is to portray its advocates as dumb and dummer, Bible-thumping ignoramuses who know nothing about Science. Check out the academic and scientific credentials of the authors and editors of the books published by this Foundation. Agree with them or not, they do know about Science! But that goes to the point I want to make.

The Debate is not really about who has the best academic credentials: your PhD against my PhD. I am glad that the editors and authors writing and advocating ID are very qualified to do so by the world's standards. I think that the battle is won or lost on other grounds. If the experts can cancel each other out by the intelligent design of their respective arguments, there remains the battle behind the battle: the virulent animosity of Material Naturalists against God (Trinitarian Theism)

There is a false and unscriptural optimism among many evangelicals that if unbelievers would only hear the facts supporting Theism (let alone Biblical Trinitarianism), including or maybe starting with ID, then unbelievers will be persuaded. Supposedly, their minds are open, they are simply ignorant. Facts and Logic will win the day. This is absolutely not true. Short of regeneration, the hardened heart and corrupted mind of non-Christians will never chose to believe in the Triune God. They will always chose not to believe, no matter what scientific arguments are given them. Of course, believing (Covenant) children need to be able to recognize, understand and refute Naturalism (Atheism and Darwinism) wherever it is found (and it is pervasive in public schools), so books like Pendas are very important to have. But we must not seek to play the unbelievers game and use their Modernist-Rationalist designs to win the stuggle against their hostile minds, that, by nature, suppress true Truth. That is not intelligent on our part

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 13:34

QT Thots

Psalm 90 Lord, Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God. Heavenly Father, I am so locked into the now- the tyranny of the urgent. I watch the clock. There are deadlines to meet. Appointments to keep. Thank you for reminding me this Monday morning, that you are eternal and unchanging. I am glad that You are here, in my time, working in my now; but I am also thankful that You are above time and are everlasting, unchanging- not pressured by my schedule or struck by the hands of my clock You turn us back to the dust and say, 'Go back, O child of earth.' For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. You sweep us away like a dream; we fade away suddenly like the grass. In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered. The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength even eighty;...they pass away quickly and we are gone. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Thank you for reminding me with this Psalm, to make the most of my time. Isn't this a contradiction? Not really. This makes me evaluate the whole span of my life: what does it add up to. This makes me take the long look- to find perspective: what really matters in the long run. Most of my time is spent on things that do not really matter when I have eternity in view. I need wisdom in how I am spending a life which can be over so soon. Satisfy us by your loving-kindness in the morning; so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.... Thank You for reminding me of what really satisfies: You do May the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us; prosper the work of our hands. Lord, hear my prayer. Amen

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 11:13

Saturday, November 26, 2005

Advent has Come: a Time for Prayer and Fasting?

For those of you who attend non liturgical churches which do not follow the Church Calendar, tomorrow is the first Sunday of Advent. The lady across the street has already put up a lot of Christmas lights on her porch, but it is not yet Christmas. That arrives on December 25 and lasts for Twelve Days until Epiphany. I do not know why I bother to repeat all of this every year, as almost no one seems to agree or care. Parking lots were jammed yesterday with people who remind me of lemmings. It is the American Amalgamation of Anniversaries, marking several annual religious and secular events. As usual, the Babe is covered over and almost lost in the straw piled on by a pagan people. It is right to be troubled by this. Advent was originally not a time for parties, but for penitent preparation for the prophesied Priest who was coming from Heaven to earth to make atonement for the sins of the world by the sacrifice of Himself. Then, having arrived, we greet that Happy Morn with joyous celebration that lasts for almost 2 weeks. We mustn't let all that get lost with the lemmings.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:06

Mad About Harry

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/commentaries/madaboutharry.html>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 14:24

Friday, November 25, 2005

The law of Unintended Consequences

I have been thinking about comments made about an earlier post about the difference between violence and deaths caused intentionally and unintentionally. Yesterday, a reckless driver here plowed his truck, from behind, into a car, killing a 2 year old and seriously injuring his parents. I doubt if the pick-up driver intended to do this damage. Nevertheless, the child is dead and the parents are still in critical condition. The driver has been charged with motor vehicle homicide and the negligent operation of a motor vehicle. The driver did not intentionally set out to murder the two year old. Nevertheless, the driver is guilty of a crime: homicide. True accidents do happen, however negligent operation is driving with disregard for the well-being of others, knowingly acting in a manner that could have the consequences of bodily harm or death of another and not giving a [hoot] That is morally and legally wrong. If the public is ok with such behavior and condones it, that doesn't excuse it. The public is wrong. The driver in this case is an "habitual offender", driving a stolen vehicle with a revoked license.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequence

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 13:01

Is God good only when He helps us?

Psalm 91 will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing to your name, O Most High. When my enemies are driven back, they will stumble and perish at your presence. For you have maintained my right and my cause; you sit upon your throne judging right. ... the Lord is enthroned for ever; he has set up his throne for judgment. It is he who rules the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity. The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. Those who know your name will put their trust in you, for you never forsake those who seek you, O Lord. Sing praise to the Lord who dwells in Zion. Of course, I join in joy with those friends who experience healing, for which they rightly thank the Lord. They are glad to tell all that God is good and they praise Him. What about those Believers who suffer and die from disease or tragedy. God never intervened- never came to the rescue. Is this the same God? Is He fickle with His favor? Do our thanksgivings and our praises require experiencing Divine help? Can we, will we, praise and thank Him by faith when we go through valley's of darkness, when prayers seem unanswered, when loved ones suffer in pain like unbelievers do? Even Jesus was forsaken in his trials. The Psalmists often cry: Why, God, why? Has God stopped being good then? Do we then refuse to praise Him? "Nah, Nah. He didn't help me. He's no good nomore! I don't praise Him no more!" With a broken heart and tears streaming down, Faith still stubbornly declares- For you have maintained my right and my cause; you sit upon your throne judging right. ... the Lord is enthroned for ever; he has set up his throne for judgment. It is he who rules. Most of the original Pilgrims died at sea or in the wilderness, yet they contually said. "It hath seemed right to the Lord..." It's all about God, not us. Blessed be His Name. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord."

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:37

Simple 3 Point Sermon

The Apostle Paul tells us (Rom 3) that "while we were weak", Christ died for us- and "while we were sinners"-----and "while we were enemies" Note the progression: weakness, sin and hostility. Most evangelism these days seems to focus on the first- weakness. The Gospel is presented to people who are hurting as the solution they need. They are glad to come to Jesus for healing and help. That's it. No interest in sin, let alone repentance from that sin. The presentation these days does not often seek to confront folks with their sin, let alone call them to Christ for forgiveness. I know some traditional evangelists and "soul-winners" still do. When was the last time you heard any presentation of the Gospel include exposing and confronting deep rooted hostility in the heart toward God? probably never. Truth is all three dimensions of the human condition are present and need to be, and can be met, by the Gospel. Our presentation of that Gospel must include all three: Healing, Forgiveness and Reconciliation. If we came to Christ for only the healing or only the forgiveness, we must experience both. Most of us have never really faced up to the hostility within us toward the God who heals and forgives. As strange as that sounds, it's true. The test comes when He asks us to obey Him and

doing that is going to cost us a lot. More than anything, the Lord requires a broken, submissive and trusting heart and life.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:50

Black Friday?

Somehow, I have never been aware till now that this day after Thanksgiving is called Black Friday. I understand it means the day when retailers hope to make it out of the Red into the Black in their cash flow. Some are protesting this "Day" with another, called "Buy Nothing Day" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buy_Nothing_Day Are either of these Christian Holidays?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:30

TAMBO [That All May Be One]- the name of my High School Youth Group

Ezekiel 37:15-28...Thus says the Lord GOD: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. The Pilgrims who settled here around 1620, thought of themselves as the new Israel. Since then, it has been customary for Christians to think of America as both the Promised Land and, as a Nation, the New Israel. The Pilgrims were more Biblical. The United States of America is not the New Israel, but the Church is. (Rom 4, Gal 4-6) And this Church of Christ is now scattered around the globe and seriously divided in many ways. As we enter Advent and all Christians look once again to Bethlehem, "O Lord, we pray, forgive us our divisions, and hasten the day when we are truly, actually, united in our One Holy Lord." They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. Forgive us, Lord, our transgressions and apostasies, as your People. Deliver us from them and cleanse us, that we might truly, actually be One Holy People. My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Renew a right spirit and an obedient heart in us, your Covenant People, O Lord. Grant us grace to follow your Law and live our lives according to your Word. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them for evermore. Yes, Lord, come and dwell among us in a new, powerful way. May we know your Presence in our midst as a People so that, being united in your Spirit and Truth, the world around us may see You in us.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:36

Thursday, November 24, 2005

Getting History Straight: the First Thanksgiving

A man, who is the Chief of a local Native American tribe, spoke to a third grade public school class here in town last week. From the sound byte interview on TV, he apparently told the children that the Pilgrims arrived here and were greeted by his ancestors, who hosted a great feast for them. The Pilgrims in turn, he allegedly said to those young impressionable minds, killed those Indians and stole their land. This is absolutely not true. The original settlers and their Native neighbors lived and worked together in peace for more than 50 years. I hope the students' parents have taught them the historically accurate story of the Pilgrims. Here is a very helpful site <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mosmd/#part4> And here is a Scripture passage that suits what the Pilgrims were doing on that First Thanksgiving well. They saw themselves as "Israelites" Deuteronomy 26:1-11 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.' When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.' You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 08:42

Wednesday, November 23, 2005

Common Grace- Special Grace

Luke 1:51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Matthew 5:45 your Father in heaven...causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Acts 14:17 he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."The phrase, "Common Grace", is not found in the Bible; but, the concept is everywhere, such as in these verses. It is a very important concept. God is good. His Creation, as created, is good (Genesis 1-2) . It is essentially still good after the Fall and Curse of Genesis 3. God is providentially active in His Creation, ie- in its physical, material operation. He is providentially involved in the care of the creatures He has made. This includes human beings. God is providentially involved in history, which after all, is His Story. All of this is what is meant by Common Grace and it is something that has not changed because of the sinful nature or acts of Humankind. In fact, this Common grace works to contain the effects of evil (Luke 1 above) The latter benefits daily by this Common Grace. All creatures share in common this grace (these gifts) of God. Special grace is the effectual calling and keeping of specific persons, ie-the Elect (Rom 8) This special grace is spiritual and eternal, compared to the common grace which is physical or material and temporal. Common Grace is a witness to God (Rom 1) and the context, and often the means by which, Special Grace works. Both Common Grace and Special Grace serve the purposes of God. Both are intended to bring Him Glory. On Thanksgiving, and always, even the most strident atheist, as well as agnostics everywhere, have reason to thank God for His Common Grace upon which their daily lives depend (Acts 17) In addition, Christians thank God for the Special Grace which has chosen, called, regenerated, generated saving faith, justified, is daily sanctifying and keeping them and which one day will glorify them.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:21

Tuesday, November 22, 2005

CS Lewis

There is one of those "eternal flames" in a park here, burning as a memorial to JFK who was killed 42 years ago today. That reminds me that on this same day, C.S.Lewis also passed away, 42 years ago. With the movie version of his Lion, Witch and Wardrobe about to open (Dec 9th), we note that Lewis is as popular and influential today as ever, effectively still making a difference for Christ after all these years- a marvelous legacy for which we are thankful. Is that a roar I hear in the distance? A good portal site for a lot of information about the man and his work is aptly named "Into the Wardrobe" Find it here
<http://cslewis.drzeus.net/>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 18:13

We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing

Well, faithful Readers of this Blog, we do, indeed, have much for which to be thankful. May the Lord bless you as you gather to enjoy, and to thank Him for, His blessings the day after tomorrow. Here is the very interesting story of a traditional Hymn often sung at Thanksgiving
<http://www.opinionjournal.com/la/?id=110007583>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:57

Monday, November 21, 2005

Seeing Things the Way They Are

Tis the Season for the annual fund-raising appeals that come in the mail from all over the country. Today included one from a monastery in Oklahoma. The Brothers there live a a simple austere life of prayer and daily manual labor in their garden. They only want to raise \$20 million dollars for a new chapel and visitors center ?! Vow of poverty indeed. The image of the Brothers portrayed in the promotional letter and leaflet doesn't go along with the image portrayed by their fund raising campaign goals. The local paper published a survey yesterday in which those interviewed said they see people who live in New England as aloof, reserved and basically unfriendly. We'll be going downtown in a few minutes. We'll be driving through the main Hispanic section of the City. These New Englanders are far from aloof, reserved and unfriendly. They do not fit the stereotype at all. Neither do most of the New Englanders thronging to the Mall a few miles from here. I mentioned the huge Black Pentecostal Church building, standing a few miles down the road, to a person at the white church where I preached recently. Oh, she said, those folks are not from this town. "This town" has had a predominately Black population for many years. The stereotype, based on what once was, persists. There was that Young Couples' Class I was asked to speak to in one church. Everyone in the Class were elderly. How come, I asked? Well, that was the name of the class when it started years ago and we never bothered to change it. We rightfully make much about Truth. "Truth" is defined as correspondence to reality. There are many illustrations possible where what people say about themselves, or about how people are perceived by others, which are not true: they do not correspond to what is. Sometimes this is not intentional; rather, what "is" has changed and the representation has not changed with it. This is very common. We want Truth in Doctrine. We also need Truth in people and about people.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:00

QT Thots: Good News for the Mountains

Ezekiel 36:1a,8-15 And you, mortal, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say: You, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel; ... See now, I am for you; I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown; and I will multiply your population, the whole house of Israel, all of it; the towns shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt; and I will multiply human beings and animals upon you. They shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Today's Old Testament reading [from Oremus] is very unusual. We humans often enjoy aspects of Nature, especially scenic areas. We pay exorbitant prices for houses with a view of mountains or water ways. But, our feelings toward Nature are conflicted. Some of us look forward to snow on Christmas Eve. On many other days, we complain, even curse the snow and the scenery and, we know, the weather outside can be frightful. We know "Mother Nature" can be dangerous and we continually have reminders of how ferocious "she" can be with "her" hurricanes or droughts. Many of us plan to travel this Thursday for the Holiday, but the forecast is for bad weather. Ugh! In some way, the earth has been cursed as part of the Fall described in Genesis 3. We see evidence of that all our lives. What this passage from Ezekiel reminds us is that the earth will share in the Redemption of Christ. (Rom 8) Redemption is not only about me or you: Redemption is about God transforming what He originally formed only to have sin deform. That can include you and me; but, Ezekiel is concerned here with the Earth itself, the mountains in particular: "I am for you", he quotes God as saying. Christmas celebrates the wonder of God coming to be with us. The Gospel assures us that God is for us. Ezekiel declares that God is also for His Creation, all of it.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:12

Sunday, November 20, 2005

Why do Many Children Call Adults by their First Names?

Next week, Advent has come. That will be the beginning of the Church Year. Today celebrates Christ the King. Many Christians miss this, especially Evangelicals. This may be due to the penchant these days for having children calling adults by their first name. Some see this practice a sign of disrespect for adults. Others explain it as something many adults encourage because they do not want to be seen as authoritarian, lording over the children. It seems very common these days to consider Christ to be human just like us [not with reference to the Incarnation]. Christ is thought of as The Ideal Person. What do you think of Jesus? Well, he is kind, thoughtful, loves children and animals and smiles a lot. He is warm and welcoming to all. He especially identifies with the marginalized and society's stigmatized. He is a servant of all, especially the least, last and lost. He is non-judgemental, open and affirming, etc- all the correct character traits of our time. Of course, he was a pacifist, too. Dare I say, this popular picture is not a Biblical portrait. Somehow, it is often overlooked that Jesus the man, preached and warned about Judgement and Hell more than any other prophet in the Bible. He was not open and affirming of all sinners, eg- the self-righteous and religious hypocrites. He could be very angry and threw people out of the local Temple. He believed in Satan and sin and insisted all people, including the poor and marginalized, needed to repent or they would not enter God's Kingdom. What is overlooked most, is that the Jesus we worship and serve is not the Nazarene Carpenter, but the ascended King who reigns as Lord and Sovereign over all. This seems to be a hard teaching for those adults who do not want to be seen as authoritarian and, in turn, question authority and teach their children to do so also. I guess that is why they overlook Christ the King Day. Actually, Jesus has always been King Jesus. Who he is can not be understood apart from the context of the great Cosmic Conflict between Him and Satan, from the beginning of History. The Incarnation we are about to celebrate is about Jesus the King coming to earth to do battle with His Adversary (and ours). The healings and exorcisms in the Gospels are all skirmishes in the Conflict. The cross and the tomb are, too. They are the occasion when Satan was finally defeated. Jesus ascended and has been reigning in Glory ever since. Many of His People have yet to grasp and claim their Lord's Victory and live lives needlessly defeated by the defeated Ancient Serpent. Jesus is Christus Victor- Christus Rex. Today, We lift the Cup of Salvation and salute Him: Hail, King Jesus!

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 15:17

Does God love the Poor more than Others?

God ministers Justice equally to all- He treats all, rich and poor, fairly without partiality- with equity. God does not have a special love for the Poor- He loves everyone; He loves His Covenant People. God does not favor the Poor (as a class) over the Rich or over the Saints- we must not romanticize or idolize the Poor- some are saved, some are unsaved, some are righteous and some evil. The Law of God spells out Rights and Wrongs. Murder and Theft are murder and theft, etc. God is on the side of anyone who suffers Injustice- those who's Rights are denied. It is more Scriptural if we say God is on the side of those who suffer injustice, rather than on the side of the poor as such. Not all poor suffer injustice. Many rich people do. It is not valid to equate the Poor with the Oppressed (this is usually done using contemporary definitions of both words) More than 20 causes of Poverty are mentioned in Scripture. Injustice is a cause, but not always. Poverty may be caused by natural disaster. In December 2004, thousands were killed and millions became homeless because of a Tsunami in the Far East. They are now poor, but not because of Injustice. According to the Bible, poverty may also be caused by Disease, Death, War, Lifestyle Choices (Laziness, Addictions, Waste) and Ignorance. The Poor in Scripture are typically those who have lost their land (their livelihood) or their husbands (the sole Breadwinner in Bible times) or their parents. These are weak and the ones of whom the powerful take advantage. It is the weak and powerless who are the usual victims of oppression. If a natural disaster makes rich people homeless, most likely they will have the means and the connections to pursue their rights and will not be victimized. There are 10 basic root words in the Bible for oppression. There are 10 other related words. They are all used a total of 555 times and in 164 incidents they are connected with poverty or the Poor. There are many metaphors also associating oppression and poverty. Oppression is also often connected with Idolatry. Those who oppress the poor are typically rich, powerful idolaters. The words for "Oppression" or "Oppressed" are also variously translated as "violated, treated violently, subdued, crushed, killed, defrauded, deceived, cheated, exploited, stolen from, robbed" and treated with "scorn or contempt". Wherever, whenever, any of this happens, to anyone, it is evil and God opposes it. All such behavior transgresses His Law. It is unjust and God requires Justice. Many people, made poor and homeless by a natural disaster, will probably also become oppressed. Many of them will be denied their rights and treated unjustly. God hates that, and for that reason, will be on their side and work for their vindication. It is far more accurate, Biblically, to say that

God is on the side of Justice, than to say God is on the side of the "Poor".

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 14:31

Friday, November 18, 2005

Harry Potter's Latest Film Adventure

I continue to be impressed and to profit from the film reviews at this site-
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/> Sign up for their weekly newsletter for the latest. The one that came today is very good. It is about being opened minded about film, film reviews and Christians who disagree with each other. In this case, about Harry Potter. The writer finds it ironic that the same Believers who are looking forward to Lion, Witch and Wardrobe shun Harry Potter because there is witchcraft in the latter, ignoring that there is witchcraft in the former as well. Here is another site that might be helpful-<http://christiananswers.net/spotlight/home.html>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 16:32

Crime in the City

Yesterday there was another homicide in Springfield. A 19 year old was shot on the street. This is the 13 th of the year and there are the usual cries of outrage and calls for the "City" to do something. (Most of the homicides are drug or gang related) There has been a greater number of deaths in the city, so far this year, caused by drivers of cars who are breaking the law (usually speeding and going through lights or stop signs). No outcry. Yesterday's victim was a 15 year old. No one is calling upon the City to do anything. One teen is as tragically dead as the other and both by reckless, illegal behavior. The difference is only that reckless and illegal driving, like drunk driving, is still socially acceptable or condoned. How come?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 11:37

Structural Evil

In my current study, I am trying to get more of a handle on the concept of systemic or structural or institutional evil. As a rule, conservative evangelicals reject, or at least do not like, the concept because they believe it is used as an excuse for unacceptable behavior and the shirking of individual responsibility. It is a given: God holds each individual accountable for their behavior. No matter what the extenuating circumstances may be, we are each responsible for our actions. That is absolutely Biblical; but so also is the Reality of the World, the Flesh and the Devil. The Bible clearly says that we are born into this Reality and it influences and controls the choices and behavior of all human beings, including Christians of every kind. It also clearly tells us the Good News that forgiveness and deliverance from the influence, control and power of the World (Cosmos), Flesh (Sarx) and the Devil has been made possible by the work and ministry of Christ for us and in us. That being the case, evangelicals should have no problem accepting the reality of systemic or structural or institutional evil. There is a confluence of these realities. The World, Flesh and Devil are manifest in the systems, structures and institutions of the society or culture into which we have been born and through which they influence and control the decisions and behavior of people, including Christians of all kinds. Likewise, the Good News is that there can be forgiveness and deliverance from the influence, control and power of systemic or structural or institutional evil. The beginning of that is the recognition of its existence.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:24

Is It Still Basketball?

We enjoyed watching the UConn women's basketball game last night. We noticed that there was an extra line painted on the floor, experimentally redefining the distance for 3 pt shots. We have enjoyed watching UConn games for many years. We have watched our grandchildren playing basketball, too. Somehow, I had not noticed or learned that there have been major changes over the years. The 3 pt shot itself is an addition after my school days. What I particularly refer to is the disappearance of the players I thought were on every team. In my day, there were two forwards, two guards and a center. I assumed there still are. Apparently, for years, there actually has been a center and a point guard, shooting guard, small forward and a power forward. And now, in college ball at least, there is a point guard, two wings and two point players. Apparently they can change roles and are either post players (part center, part power forwards) or wings (part small forwards and shooting guards). I have been watching post players and wings without

realizing it! Is it still basketball?

The object of the game remains the same. There are still only 5 players in the game, whatever they are called. There is still passing, up and down the court, and shooting to score baskets. The team with most points still wins. I have enjoyed all of that without knowing about the changes. The total game still delivers enjoyment for me (ie- the women's college game, which displays great passing and teamwork. The taller men do far too much slam-dunking shownboating by individual players, esp in the pro games) .The point of all this here? The names of church team players,too, has changed greatly during my lifetime. Is it still the same (ecclesiastical) game or do the name changes make a difference? Does it matter that Pastors are now called Coaches, Spiritual Advisors, or Mentors ? That churches now have Solo Pastors, Senior Pastors, Pastors or Ministers of Worship, of Youth, of Discipleship, of Visitation, of Outreach, of Administration? or the ubiquitous "Leader" ? Does it matter that some churches insist that all the members be called ministers (I was ordained to be a Minister of the Gospel, ie- a clergyman) Does it matter that church buildings are now called Centers (like Hospitals and Nursing Homes are also now called Centers) or that denominational names have been replaced by "Community". Is it still "basketball"? Can I still enjoy the game without knowing about these name changes? What other changes would it take before the game itself changed and became unrecognizable?

Posted by Cal at 10:06

QT Thots

Psalm 40 [adapted]I waited patiently upon the Lord; he stooped to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many shall see and stand in awe and put their trust in the Lord. This is not about praying to be "saved"- Sometimes, we Christians find ourselves sitting in desolate pits, stuck in miry clay: closed in, unable to extricate ourselves. Then the thing to do is call on the Lord and wait patiently for His help to come. The waiting is the hard part. But His help does come! Then we have a testimony of deliverance to share with others. Hopefully others who are "stuck" will also look patiently to the Lord.Happy are they who trust in the Lord! they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods. There is none who can be compared with you.When we are trapped in what looks like a hopeless situation and help from the Lord is slow coming, we are tempted to resort to secular solutions. We seek advice from "the world" as to solving our problems. The wise Christian has learned from hard experience not to do this and in the long run he is happy that he waited patiently on the Lord. Such a believer remembers Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God! and this reminds and reassures him how great your wonders and your plans for us! And what does the Lord require in return? A listening ear and a willing heartIn sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure, you have given me ears to hear you; Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, and so I said, 'Behold, I come. ... "I love to do your will, O my God;

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:54

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

The Pre-eminent Moral Issue of our Time?

A recent AP article quoting several polls and current research, indicates what seems obvious: the topic of abortion is a very important issue for the majority of Americans. One-third of all American women will have had an abortion by the time they are 45. The number of reported abortions declined in the 90's. There were 1.29 million reported in 2002. 41% of Americans believe abortion is wrong in some circumstances and 29% think it is morally wrong in almost all circumstances. 25 % do not think it is a moral issue. It is not only a literal life and death issue, but a touchstone for several others: gov't intrusion into personal privacy, women's rights, states' rights, judicial restraint- all kinds of "Liberal vs Conservative" issues cluster around this one topic. Certainly more is involved than only the topic of abortion itself. Debate about the latter must take into account the former. Being "pro-choice" means far more than being pro-abortion. Being "pro-life" should mean being far more than being anti-abortion. Those of us who say we are pro-life should be pro-marriage, pro-children and pro-family. Anti-abortion also should mean anti-Euthanasia and anti-Eugenics. Some would argue being pro-life should also include being anti-war and anti-capital punishment. How about anti-poverty and anti-death by preventable disease? It seems to me that many who are against abortion are often not really pro-LIFE. How could that be?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 12:00

The Marks of a Healthy Church

Through recent years a number of books have appeared describing the marks of a healthy Church. One of these is by Mark Dever http://www.9marks.org/CC_Content_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID616736|CIID,00.html will list Dever's marks and my short, simplistic summary of each

1. Expository Preaching - sermons that work through passages of Scripture, Book by Book, verse for verse, explaining and applying them
 2. Biblical Theology- teaching lots of Theology or Bible Doctrine, primarily in the sermons
 3. Biblical Understanding of the Good News- something along the line of the "Roman Road", emphasizing that people are lost in sin and need to be saved through the work of Christ alone
 4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion- such is a work of God, of Grace, upon hearing the Gospel and not primarily an emotional, subjective experience
 5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism- calling sinners to repentance and saving faith
 6. Biblical Understanding of Membership- serious commitment to church life
 7. Biblical Church Discipline- serious effort to keep the church pure
 8. Promotion of Christian Discipleship and Growth- emphasis on growth in holiness
 9. Biblical Understanding of Leadership- plurality of strong Elders
- All of this sounds simply like the old fundamental Baptist Church in which I was ordained (only we called the Elders, Deacons). I no longer believe this is an adequate model.

Notice that Dever's traditional model is presented from a Pastor's and organizational perspective. There are several Models of the Church in the Bible. One of these Biblical models seems especially relevant today: The Church as the Body of Christ. The local congregation as such, the members being parts of the Body, is to visibly, physically be Christ in a local place, small town or neighborhood in a city. This organic, incarnational or sacramental model of the Church is missing altogether from Dever's approach. To those who say: "We would see Jesus" we should be able to say: "Look at our Church" And what would they see? A Congregation that is committed to serious and joyous worship. A Congregation of people who are serious intercessors before the Throne of God. A Congregation of people whose relationships are right, as measured by the life of Jesus. A Congregation of people who resolutely live according to the Norms of God. A Congregation which will pay the cost of being the Body of Christ in our society. Seeing a congregation that has these "marks", people would see Jesus in their midst. Sadly, these are not the marks of any fundamental Baptist type church I know. Sadly, a church could have Dever's 9 Marks and not have these 5 Marks. The former does not necessarily result in the latter.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 10:01

Monday, November 14, 2005

What is Jesus "about"?

A friend recently sent me this statement that came to him as part of the 40 Days of Purpose program in which he is involved- "When the first disciples chose to follow Jesus, they didn't understand all the implications of their decision. They simply responded to Jesus' invitation. That's all you need to get started: decide to become a disciple. Christ-likeness is the result of making Christ-like choices and depending on his Spirit to help you fulfill those choices. Once you decide to get serious about becoming like Christ, you must begin to act in new ways. You will need to let go of some old routines, develop some new habits, and intentionally change the way you think." On the surface, this is true and sounds good. Upon deeper reflection, it has a great flaw: it assumes the reader knows what Christ-likeness ...Christ-like choices ...becoming like Christ means. No definition or explanation of these phrases is included. How can we know what they mean?

Sister Helen Prejean, author of "Dead Man Walking", is speaking here at a local college this week. She is 66 and says that she had been content to be a nun, teaching High School English until she was 40. She is quoted in our paper as saying, "I awoke to the fact of what Jesus was about." She moved into an inner city housing project to live and work among poor African Americans. That led to her involvement with a prisoner on death row and ever since she has been an ardent opponent of Capital Punishment. This defines Christ-likeness ...Christ-like choices ...becoming like Christ for her. I am sure most people going through the 40 days of Purpose do not define these phrases in this way. Why not? Who is right? How can we know? I do not believe that what the Sister has done is what Jesus is "about". What the Sister is doing may be what Jesus wants her to do; but, Jesus is "about" far more than that. I am guessing that the Sister is basing her conviction upon a particular reading of the life of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. According to the words of Jesus in all the Gospels and the explanation of those words by the Apostles, Jesus primarily was "about" suffering and dying as an atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus went on to be raised from the grave, defeating the fallen powers and given all authority in Heaven and earth by his Father. Now Jesus Christ is enthroned above and exercises His rule on earth as Lord of All. He is "about" all of that. The singular way we are to be like Christ is to be obedient to God as he was. Jesus did the will of his Father in Heaven. In doing that, we will be like Him. How do we know what the will of the Father is? It is revealed in His Word, beginning in the beginning in Genesis.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:57

The Effective Church

The brochure announcing the next Vision New England "Congress" came today. Once again the popular pastors of huge churches are featured. American Christians continue their obsession with size and numbers. I wrote the following and posted it here last July- "I have become convinced that the church that the Lord will use most effectively to communicate the Gospel and truly make a difference in today's world will be a church which incarnates [embodies and manifests] the life of Jesus Christ in a small town, or neighborhood in a city, where its members live. It will be known for 5 characteristics-1. Spirit-led Worship2. Intercessory Prayer3. Personal holiness4. Servant and prophetic ministries5. Suffering [a consequence of 1-4] This may be its most ineffective witness. It will not be known for the size of its attendance or building."

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 14:36

Revisiting the Past

Yesterday, I conducted two Services at a mainline Congregational (UCC) church in Bloomfield, CT. I accepted the opportunity because I had a message unique to them. From the pulpit, I could see, through the window, the Masonic Hall where I had preached more than 40 years ago, helping to plant what is now a large evangelical Baptist Church in that town. [A woman on the staff of that Baptist Church came to Christ at the invitation I gave at the end of sermon I preached at an Episcopal Church in another town years ago] My sermon yesterday was about how both my father and I discovered, separately and many years apart, that there is a difference between being committed to Christ and being committed to Christian ministry. Using John 15:5, "without me you can do nothing", I urged the necessity of having a vital, personal connection with the Vine. We each learned that lesson in the context of doing ministry in liberal, mainline churches in West Hartford, the town next to Bloomfield. It's a long story, but I thought it would be appropriate and special to the congregation yesterday. There was a very warm response from many of those present at each of the Services- maybe 80-90 people. They were mostly older folks, whom I suspect do not share the agenda of the younger

staff. Some said I was should not be retired and hoped I would return. That was gratifying and I thank the Lord. The old, beautiful, colonial building reminded me of other similar churches were I have served or preached. Enough said.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 10:08

QT Thots

Oremus was down this morning, so I went to Sacred Space and was greeted by this line at the outset-"God will not have your thoughts instead of you yourself. He does not surrender himself to cerebation." As some one who values cerebation, I was struck by this.I seek to love God, as commanded, with all my mind. I passionately seek to develop and use a Christan mind- to think Biblically about everything. I intend to spend most of today studying, reading and thinking.This quote makes me realize, again, that I can do all of that apart from God and apart from any surrender or commitment of myself to Him.I do not deceive myself that God can be contained, let alone controlled, by my cerebation. The issue is whether it leads me, my Self, my total person, my thoughts and my heart and my will, to be contained and controlled by Him.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:23

Saturday, November 12, 2005

The Other Side of the Story

Cindy Sheehan spoke to a capacity crowd of over 1400 cheering people here last night with her usual and very popular message condemning the war in Iraq. A local veteran, returning from that war last week, wrote a letter to our paper, giving the other side of the story. THIS IS A MUST READIraq war vet says thanks for support

Friday, November 11,
2005 By STEPHEN E. SPELMAN Lt. Col. Special Forces, Baghdad

Thank you.

Thank you for letting us be your soldiers. Thank you for being Americans. For setting the example for us. For making us proud to do what we do.

It's Veterans Day, and we're your soldiers. We serve for you. We fight for you. We die for you.

We're fighting for you now in Iraq and Afghanistan. We fought for you at LZ X-Ray, Pork Chop Hill and Normandy. Someday, we'll fight for you God knows where.

We're the same men and women we've always been. We're from your town. We sold you your last set of tires. We teach your kids. We played ball with your cousin Tommy.

You have no idea how much we appreciate what you've done for us. You've supported us. You've supplied us. You've sustained us - in every war America has fought.

Every bit of that matters so much after a fight, back at our base camps, as we sit on our cots in the quiet, with our gear laid out around us. For a few minutes, we stop cleaning our rifles, and read the letter from home we've just been handed.

And for those few minutes, we're not in the harsh sands of Iraq or the cold mountains of Afghanistan. We're home. With you. In America.

Your soldiers love America. We really do. We love America at a level that some sophisticated people would probably make fun of. We know America isn't perfect. But we believe it's the best country going, and that, in general, we Americans try to do the right and decent thing.

Of course, being American soldiers, we ask questions. We wonder why some government officials, who found it too inconvenient to serve in the military themselves, now want to put us at almost certain risk of being tortured if we're captured.

We wonder why some Americans would rather see our president fail politically than see a new democracy flourish in Iraq. We wonder why these Americans want Iraqis to live under the "peace" and "stability" of a brutal fascist dictatorship, rather than have the freewheeling politics and right to dissent that we Americans enjoy.

And we wonder why the media would rather count our deaths than report our accomplishments. We hope you know we're doing good things in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We hope you know your soldiers are building clinics and schools, paving roads and treating sick children. We hope that word is getting out to you, through our letters, e-mails and visits home. We think it mostly isn't, but we still hope.

But being soldiers, we still go to work every day for you. Day in and day out. Just like our brothers and sisters from Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. We shrug on our body armor, strap on our helmets, pick up our weapons and go out to face a vicious and determined enemy. An enemy that hides behind the very people we're trying to help.

Your soldiers have a tough job. Every time we go out, each one of your soldiers is ready to kill someone. Each one of your soldiers knows that someone is ready to kill them. Think of that. Think of what that means.

Think of what that means for us when we return home to you. Think of what it's meant for our brothers and sisters who've returned home from Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. We who soldier now ask that you take a moment to thank those who soldiered before us. Those men and women went through hell for you, and some of them didn't get much of a homecoming.

Give them that homecoming now. A word, a pat on the shoulder, a handshake. That's all they'll need. Your soldiers earned that, fighting for you.

Your words, your prayers, and your love sustain us. They always have. For that, this Veterans Day and every other, we thank you.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:03

Friday, November 11. 2005

The Church Putting out the Fire in Paris and Beyond

Last Sunday, I posted a post, "Paris Burning" in which I said-"The rioting in Paris is by people who are, as a group,... poor. They are poor because they are not educated, productive members of society. But why are they not educated and productive? Many insist that is because they are children of immigrants, although citizens by birth. In other words, they are poor, uneducated and unemployed because they are victims of discrimination. Discriminated against because their parents are African and mostly Moslems." Then I asked, "I wonder how many Christians are working with this population? Talk about mission fields !" An answer to that question is here and it has a lot to say to churches in America, too<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/145/32.0.html>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 21:17

Just War

Today is a Holiday. Schools are closed. There is a Parade. It is Veterans Day. We remember all those who have been, or are now, serving their Country in the military, whether you think it is right or wrong. We can argue that the Bible teaches what is called the "Just War Theory". In my mind, Pacifists, in their teaching, have not adequately dealt with the problem of evil in society nor with the role of government as a servant of God in securing and maintaining peace and justice in a fallen world. Of course, to do that, the military is essential. Regardless, whether we see war as just or just war, those who have, or are now, serving our Country in the military are rightfully honored today. That especially applies to the fallen and wounded military whom we remember also on Memorial Day

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:19

Making Fun of Pat Robertson

It is easy to make fun of Pat Robertson because of his alledged prediction of God's judgment on a town in Pennsylvania for their ousting of a school board which approved the teaching of Intelligent Design. I did not hear Robertson's comment; but I suspect that what the newscasters were really ridiculing was the notion of Divine Judgement. Robertson has spoken of that on other occasions with the same result. (Unfortunately, his comments bring derision to the topic, as do the comments and antics of many Preachers bring reproach on Christ Himself. That does not change what is true) People should stop laughing. (Do not let Robertson or the response to him get us away from the subject.) There is a Day of Wrath coming. No teaching in the Bible is more clear and the Church has confessed its belief in that Day, with its Creeds, for centuries. This passage from Ezekiel was in Oremus this morning-Ezekiel 7:1-8: The word of the LORD came to me: thus says the Lord GOD An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you, I will let loose my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, I will punish you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, I will have no pity. I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are among you. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD: Disaster after disaster! See, it comes. Hmnn, disaster after disaster. Where have we been reading about them lately?

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 09:01

QT Thots

Psalm 143 adapted Lord, hear my prayer, and in your faithfulness heed my supplications; answer me in your righteousness. Enter not into judgement with your servant, for in your sight shall no one living be justified. I know I have no right to approach You. I am a sinner and have no business approaching a holy God, a consuming fire. If you took count of my sins, I would perish. Lord, I come before you hid in Christ, my righteousness. In Him and on His merits alone, I claim access to your Throne. I come to You, Lord, For my enemy has sought my life and has crushed me to the ground; making me live in dark places... My spirit faints within me; my heart within me is desolate. I lift up my soul to you. Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord, for I flee to you for refuge. I spread out my hands to you; my soul gasps to you like a thirsty land. O Lord, make haste to answer me; my spirit fails me; do not hide your face from me ... Let me hear of your loving-kindness in the morning, for I put my trust in you; ... show me the road that I must walk, Teach me to do what pleases you, for you are my God; let your good Spirit lead me on level ground. Revive me, O Lord, for your name's sake; for your righteousness' sake, bring me out of trouble. Thank you, Lord! Thank you.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:37

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

What Price Peace?

In the previous post, I wrote of the lack of minority representation and participation in the political process here in Springfield. One often proposed solution is Ward Representation, inasmuch as many minorities here are clustered geographically around the city. Each minority group (Ward) would elect and have its own representative fighting for its own interests. Is this really the answer? It is frequently heard that "ghettos" are unhealthy for the civic body. It is further heard that assimilation is absolutely essential. Thus, it seems that efforts to remove barriers and assimilate people of various languages and sub-cultures and nationalities would be called for. Homogeneity would be the goal: a united city. Many espouse this; but then contradict it in practice. Our languages, sub-cultures and nationalities are the source of our identity, our values: who we are. People naturally do not give all that up and are very stubborn about it, even when there are dire consequences. So we end up wanting both unity and diversity. But if that continues, so does discrimination, suspicion, even hate, as well as unemployment, poverty and crime. Something, someone has to give. Who? What? How do we decide? These issues are being played out in terrible form today in France and Europe <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110007491>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 11:39

Lump in the Throat

Walking in to the school cafeteria to vote yesterday brought a lump to my throat- it was an emotional experience, to participate in democracy: a privilege, as well as a civic duty. Apparently, only 25 % of eligible voters here agreed. People have been insisting that we need a change of leadership in this city of 151,000 because the present leaders have (at least) allowed the city to get into its current fiscal, moral and social problems. The incumbents were all returned to office. The majority of the population is non-white. Many have been decrying their lack of representation in government. There were many "minority" candidates running. They did not get the support they needed. With their numbers, the "non-white" voters did not take the opportunity to make it happen. The City is still in the hands of mostly Italian and Irish politicians. I am not necessarily agreeing with the critics or complainants. I am just observing that they did not back up their words with action. When have we seen that before?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 08:26

Tuesday, November 8, 2005

The Real Regulatory Principle

The Bible (especially in the Old testament) teaches that the Worship God expects and commands is- 1. The offering of sacrifice2. to the one true God3. with faith that He exists and rewards those who worship Him4. by worshippers whose lives are holy & righteousThe emphasis is on #4. Far more than Ritual, whatever it may. God looks on the heart and life of those who use it.

Psalm

24:3 who may ascend the hill of the Lord? who may stand in his holy place? who may worship? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. 5 He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. Without holiness or righteousness or obedience to His Law, whatever we do in a Worship Service is totally in vain. Worship without obedience is flat outright rejected by God. And in the New Testament, Worship is expected and important, but Jesus himself said that to love God and neighbor is more important than "correct" Worship.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 18:11

Worship Posts Below-

The four posts before this one go together. Please read them in reverse order. Thanks

Posted by Cal at 17:50

Examples of Different orders of Worship

Using the Regulatory Principle, this is a typical Worship Service in the Presbyterian Church of America-DoxologyInvocationConfession of SinsPardonLord's PrayerHymnPastoral PrayerScripture ReadingsSermonOfferingConfession of FaithCommunionHymnBenediction

The Christian Reformed Church also uses the regulatory principle. Here is what that leads them to do-Call to WorshipPassing the PeaceHymnConfession of SinsPardonReading of the LawHymnScripture readingsSermon HymnConfession of FaithPrayersOfferingCommunionHymnBenedictionThe Anglican Church does not use the Regulatory Principle- that everything in Worship must be specifically commanded in Scripture or is not allowed. Rather it follows a Theological Principle, actually constructing [historically] its Liturgy to convey the Gospel and this is does three times in each Service:3 cycles of the Gospel:Confession, Grace, Response [This formula has been modified in the newer Prayer Book Liturgies] HymnConfession of SinsPardonLord's PrayerHymnPsalms (Confession)Gospel (Scripture Readings)Confession of FaithSermonOfferingHymnPrayer of ContritionPrayers for GraceThe CommunionProtestant Evangelical Services have traditionally been preaching services, usually evangelistic, now more inspirational and therapeutic, increasingly informal and "free". They follow the Pragmatic Principle: use whatever is effective to accomplish desired results.Greetings Opening PrayerHymns/ChorusesAnnouncementsPastoral PrayerOfferingHymnA Scripture ReadingSermonHymnClosing Prayer

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:49

What Determines the Way We Should Worship?

In the on-going debate about Worship, I tried to illustrate in the previous two posts that there are at least two, very different "Models" for Worship in the Scripture. People can, and do, follow one or the other and claim that the one they follow is the Scriptural one. The question is: Are we bound to follow either or any "model" of corporate worship in the Bible? Perhaps, instead, there are principles to guide corporate worship. Yes, there are. We are not bound to either of the Models I have included here. Of course, that begs the question: what are those Biblical Principles? I offer for your consideration-

<http://www.chesapeakepresbytery.org/bco/?chapter=47>

The Reformed approach to Worship traditionally uses what is called the "Regulative Principle". In essence, specific worship practices must have Biblical precedent or support or they are not to be allowed. Some use this, for example, to authorize the non-instrumental singing of Psalms and the forbidding of singing hymns and songs from any other source and accompanied by, say, a keyboard. This is in contrast to what most evangelical Protestant Christians believe: We may do whatever we want in a Worship Service, [ideally they should add: if it does not contradict or deny sound Bible doctrine]

http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/theology/87494~9_6_99_6-58-40_PM~TH.Pratt.Reg.Princ.pdf

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 15:44

Worship Services in the Early Church

First, evangelistic preaching with an invitation to respond by being baptized-36 ... let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has

made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and

to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and

that day about three thousand persons were added. Second, a Communion Service for Believers, accompanied by a lot of fellowship and sharing-42 They devoted themselves

to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

and a lot of participation by people in the congregation, exercising charismatic gifts-18 I thank

God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; 19 nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 22 Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. 25 After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you."

26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. Apparently, people were allowed, during the Service, to ask questions and discuss issues- except for the women- As in all the churches of the saints, 34 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 37 Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. 38 Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 14:24

Worship from Ezekiel, Bk of Revelation and the 5th Century Church

Words: Liturgy of Saint James (fifth century); trans. Gerald Moultrie 1864

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords in human vesture, in the Body and the Blood
he will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of Light descendeth from the realms of endless day,
that the powers of hell may vanish as the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraph; cherubim with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 09:52

Monday, November 7, 2005

QT Thots

Psalm 16 CEV
5 You, LORD, are all I want! You are my choice, and you keep me safe.
6 You make my life pleasant, and my future is bright. This version (CEV) is almost too cheery- v. 6 sounds like a line from a sappy greeting card. And the truth is that v.5 is not always true at all.
7 I praise you, LORD, for being my guide. Even in the darkest night, your teachings fill my mind. But this line is true. I literally would not know how to live were it not for the Word and Counsel from the Lord. I do have dark nights and I turn to the Word for light. But it can be a struggle, for other things also seek to fill my mind. Where do those dark thoughts come from? Do I carry them around, deep within, during the daylight hours. Do they influence me even when I am not conscious of them?
8 I will always look to you, as you stand beside me and protect me from fear. This works when I do it- when I remind myself that God is standing right here beside me (actually, within me)
9 With all my heart, I will celebrate, and I can safely rest. When I do cast all my care on Him, and let it stay there, I do have rest and assurance that all will be well- the Lord is in control.
10 I am your chosen one. You won't leave me in the grave or let my body decay. Yes, I have to work at choosing Him, His guidance, His way for me, often each day. But I know I do that because He first chose me. I keep on choosing Him because He first chose me. He chose and called me to belong to Him- one of the Elect- for all eternity. I have no doubt about that. That is a settled issue for me. Intermittant struggles about how to live, with my thoughts and feelings, do not deprive me of this blessed assurance. In fact, it is the context out of which I live. It makes living possible.
11 You have shown me the path to life, and you make me glad by being near to me. Sitting at your right side, I will always be joyful. This, too, may sound sappy, but it is absolutely true! When I remember it. Lord, give me eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to receive.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:53

Sunday, November 6, 2005

What good has been accomplished?

The media has made much of the US military death toll reaching now more than 2000 in the war in Iraq. Jeff Jacoby, writing in the Boston Globe, notes that the media makes little of the accomplishments made possible by those deaths, as well as by those who were wounded in action¹. destruction of a murderous dictatorship². liberation of 25 million Iraqis from that dictatorship³. the emergence of democratic politics in Iraq⁴. the formation of a democratically elected government and constitution⁵. withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon⁶. the abandonment of its nuclear weapons program by Libya^{Historically}, a loss of 2000 troops to accomplish this much is very low. It is still low if 27-31,000 civilian deaths are added.
http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/11/02/the_good_news_from_iraq_is_not_fit_to_print/

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 23:41

Voting

Next Tuesday is Election Day. (A friend quipped that every day is election day for Calvinists) Here in Springfield, we are voting on Mayor, City Council and School Board. "The whole enchilada", as they say. This City is rife with corruption and mismanagement. Most of the incumbants have been around for a long time. As they also say, "It's time for a change." If someone in office is responsible for the problems, they should not be allowed to remain in office. (This, by the way, applies to church leaders, too) Everyone complains and yet officials predict only one third of those eligible will vote. My wife and I are voting and not for many of the people presently in office (there is also a need for better candidates and more choices)

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 19:44

Paris Burning

In the post below, I referred to people who are very poor because they are addicts, alcoholics and mentally ill. The rioting in Paris is by people who are, as a group, none of these things, but who are nevertheless poor. They are poor because they are not educated, productive members of society. But why are they not educated and productive? Many insist that is because they are children of immigrants, although citizens by birth. In other words, they are poor, uneducated and unemployed because they are victims of discrimination. Discriminated against because their parents are African and mostly Moslems. I do not know that for a fact. If it is true, then the white, non-Moslem, French citizens and their Leaders know what they must do- after the riots are quelled- if for no other reason than the fact that Paris is burning and will continue to do so. Meanwhile, where are the parents and leaders of the African-Moslem community? Could it be that some of them might actually be abetting their youth to riot to foster some kinds of Terrorist and radical Islamic goals? I wonder how many Christians are working with this population? Talk about mission fields !

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 19:31

Helping the Homeless

Our Sunday paper featured the story of outreach workers from two agencies here who work with the homeless, seeking to survive on our streets. They do important, good work for some extremely needy people. These people are homeless because they are addicts, alcoholics and mentally ill. Thus, they are also desperately poor. I remember when the local State School and the State Hospitals were closed down, maybe 25 years ago. The argument was freedom and dignity for the residents. They should not be made to live in these institutions. The enlightened among us insisted that their lives would be better on the outside. Minimal funding for agencies offering band aid "outpatient" services was supposed to provide the necessary care for the former residents and for other folks like them, who would come after. And many have come after them, including young adults who were children in foster care and grew to old for that system. The outreach workers and their sponsor agencies, funded with tax-payer money, are to be commended and appreciated.

But a band aid won't do, when major surgery is needed. What role should Christians and churches have in providing that surgery (or even more band aids) ?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 19:07

Never Have Your Dog Stuffed

The title of Alan Alda's new book is "Never Have Your Dog Stuffed". Great metaphor to teach the need to let things go, no matter how important to you, like a favorite pet, they may have been. But Alda was after something else. True story: his dog had died and his father had it stuffed for him. Alda's father thought he should have the stuffed dog, not Alda. The lesson: don't try to decide for others what they should keep instead of letting go. That is a personal decision, not to be made by others, no matter how well meaning they may be.

Posted by Cal at 18:47

Morning Prayer Today

It is 9:30 and I have just finished my daily Quiet Time. I have a head cold today and did not go to Church this morning with my wife, as usual. Instead, I turned to an old favorite resource: the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. <http://www.missionstclare.com/english/index.html> If you go there, I recommend clicking on Morning Prayer whole text. It is the easiest to use. I did that and really was blessed in using the prayers and Scripture readings this morning. If I had my druthers, I would go back to being an Episcopalian. I really appreciate and enjoy the BCP and the Liturgy and I miss the Eucharist each week. To me it really has been a means of grace. Interestingly, the Old Testament text today is from Ezra. He was weeping before God over Israel- they had not been faithful to the Word of God, particularly (in this passage) in the matter of marriage to unbelievers. These men loved their "foreign" wives and children; but, for the welfare of the Nation they agreed they had done wrong and agreed to "send them away". When the world-wide Anglican Communion agrees, for the good of the "Nation", to send the ECUSA away, out of its Communion and gets on being the Church God has called it to be, I will be glad to return. [or, alternatively: if the ECUSA agrees to officially withdraw from the Anglican Communion and go its independent way] I do not want to simply be a part of some new Denomination that scavenges the Church for parts and assembles its own "car" to drive in.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 09:37

Friday, November 4, 2005

How Wide is the Ocean?

The issues raised in the previous post are relevant on other topics. One of the major objections to what I was saying yesterday about redeeming the culture is raised by those who insist our concern must be, not with culture, but with individuals. Culture and Civilization (which includes institutions) are hopeless. They can not be redeemed. God is not interested in redeeming them. Redemption is only about the salvation of individuals. The Kingdom of God is not about His Rule and Realm over the entire world, but is limited to His spiritual work in individual souls. This view is not Scriptural. This argument is made by people who are also concerned with seating a pro-life candidate on the Supreme Court and who advocate for a Constitutional Amendment to define Marriage. These same Christians also usually have strong opinions about Social Security and Tax Reform and Government policies on everything from prescriptions for the elderly, health care for the poor, FEMA and disaster Relief and the war in Iraq. Apparently, for such people, God has nothing to say about any of these cultural matters or the institutions involved. Instead, our opinions and actions are determined by our "secular" political philosophy or whether our personal ox is being gored or our nest feathered-anything but the Word of God. Such is the "dualism" I have written about before and it is not Scriptural. The King of kings and Lord of all is very much interested in culture, institutions and civilization.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:50

The True Church?

I value being part of an institutional Church with a rich history and tradition extending back, past the Reformation of the mere 16th Century, to the Apostles. At least I value the idea of such. In reality, there is no such Church- or at least no agreement as to which church on the scene today this might be. There have been so many splits and schisms. There is a River, continuous from the beginning; but, it is often dried up in places or has overflowed its banks in others and it has an ever increasing number of tributaries and streams. Which is more important: the elusive River or the very real stream in which we may be standing? Strangely, the people to whom this is a very pressing issue and of great importance are the people whose career is at stake: Clergy whose ordination is validated by claims to Historic (if not direct) Apostolic Succession. Should this be an important issue to the rest of us? If so, what are the signs or marks of the institutional Church of the River? The option is to replace or minimize any institutional Church and go for a spiritual church with an ad hoc organization, here and there, as necessary for the times.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:54

QT Thots

Luke 16: 1-8 Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. What do I do just to make people like me? What do I avoid doing just so I will not offend friends. What do I do that is not honest? What do I not say just because I might lose important relationships? What do I do just so people will

Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>

welcome me into their homes? Father, forgive me. Why am I afraid? Help me to be open and honest about who I am, where I am, and trust you to take care of my relationships. NOTEThe Oremus site wasn't working properly this morning, so I went to another I sometimes use.

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/#outline>This site takes you through a more meditative devotion than Oremus, using 6 steps or disciplines-The Presence of GodFreedomConsciousnessThe WordConversationConclusionThis website is maintained by Jesuits in Ireland. I am not recommending everything on it- only the basic material that goes with the 6 Steps

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:00

Thursday, November 3, 2005

Our One God-given Purpose

The Purpose God, the Creator, has given to every human being is to be pro-Life, in the broadest, most inclusive sense possible. This Purpose is properly known as the "Cultural Mandate". It is better understood as the "Stewardship Mandate". Why are all the babies, being born in this hour, being born? Why are they coming into this world? What are they to do before passing away from this world? Why were you and I born? What is the Purpose of every human being? Each of us is marvelously made, body and brain, including our emotions. More than that, each of us is created in the Image of God. Like Him, we have rational, creative, moral and relational abilities. Being in God's Image, we are God's representatives here on earth. He has placed us in the world He created. He wrought order out of chaos. He blessed His creation, pronounced it to be good. It exists to glorify and serve God. We human beings are here to continue and extend God's creational work- turning the Garden into a Civilization to glorify and serve God. Creation and Civilization will do that as they function according to His Norms- everything, literally, being directed to accomplish His will (Norms, Principles, Word, Law) This is why we all are here. This is our purpose: using our bodies and brains, using our faculties for rationality, creativity, morality and community, we are to work with and for God: seeking to build civilization as God intended it to become at Creation. We each enter the world under this Mandate from God to be His stewards, cultivating and caring for what He has made. This does not change for Christians. We do not have a Purpose different than all other people. Why especially should Christians fulfil the Stewardship Mandate? Because we love our Creator, the world He has made, and our fellow human beings and neighbors on this earth. We want to obey the Great Commandments. We strive to convince those who have different purposes to forsake them and join us in fulfilling this singular purpose. The effort to do that fulfills the Great Commission. When asked how fulfilling the Stewardship Mandate can be possible, given the fallen and corrupt condition of this world and our own nature, we proclaim the Good News of the Incarnation: the obedient life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus who is the Christ. Through all of this, redemption has come. The Enemies have been conquered. The Reign of God has entered History. The re/formation, the redirection of the world is now possible. The New Man, the New Adam, each human being in Christ, can and must fulfill the Purpose for which s/he was created.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:38

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

More about The Communion of Saints

A good Protestant friend reminds me that yesterday, Oct 31, is known as Reformation Day in many, especially Lutheran, Protestant Churches. Of course, an important commemoration it is. That does not change anything I said about All Saints Day which is today, Nov.1. Two different days. Please notice I said nothing about praying to the Saints or asking them to pray for us. The common Protestant objection to observing All Saints Day is based on the idea that All Saints Day is about such prayer. My concern is not with the Day, but with the Doctrine of the Communion of Saints. To me, All Saints Day reminds us [or can remind us] that the Body of Christ is universal and both militant and triumphant, including generations of Believers past, present and future. Remembering this truth can be a much needed corrective of the highly individualistic, non-ecclesial, anti-institutional, gnostic, ahistorical concept of the Church so very prevalent today. Here are what some of the Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation say about the "Communion of the Saints" mentioned in the Creeds:

Augsburg Confession Article XXI: Of the Worship of the Saints ...the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayer; The Belgic Confession Article XXVII - The Catholic Christian Church We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be.... Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit. The Heidelberg Catechism-54. Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church? A. I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it. 55. Q. What do you understand by the communion of saints? A. First, that believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts. Second, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members. The Westminster Confession Chapter XXV. Of the Church. I. The catholic or universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Chapter XXVI. Of the Communion of the Saints. I. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God; and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities, and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 16:10

The Other Racism

The story of Rosa Parks has again made the story of Black-White race relations front page news. Actually, it never goes away. My recent reading, and some documentaries I have seen lately, remind me of that other Racism which rarely is mentioned these days, but, arguably, has been even more pervasive and important in world history: anti-Semitism. Near our house is a large Center, dedicated to preserving artifacts and memorabilia of the WW II Holocaust. We drive by it almost daily and it serves to remind me of this other Racism. We must never forget it.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:45

Paying the Consequences

The book I mentioned below about Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh concludes with the recognition that both men are enigmas. They combine their anti-Semitism and support of Hitler and the Third Reich with generous, humanitarian efforts and great contributions to the welfare of America and its economy and progress. No one seems able to explain their attraction to the "Dark Side". Their legions of admirers still defend them and excuse what they did before and during the War as simply bad judgement or ignorance. Mostly, many seem to believe, they were duped and exploited by others. There is truth to all of that. Both men saw themselves as patriots and were convinced they were serving the peace and good of the world. It is also true that they did not act alone. What they said and did found resonance among multitudes of Americans, who knowingly and gladly idolized both men. Hero-worship, even idolatry, having a strong strain in our society. But ideas have consequences. Even if these "heroes" had the best of motives [very debatable], the consequences of their words and acts resulted in horrible evil and suffering in the world. Whatever explanations may be given to explain them, they must still be held accountable for the outcome of what they said and did. That outcome is not disputed; and it is not erased if the men simply were duped or showing poor judgement. The same lesson applies to many other Leaders and the public that supports them, throughout our History and today.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 10:34

All Saints Day

Halloween was not intended to be a Hollow Evening filled with the macabre. Originally, it was a Hallowed (Holy) Evening, the night before today: All Saints Day. We Protestants neglect, or even reject, All Saints Day as being "Catholic". Yet, many of us recite the Creeds in which we confess faith in the Communion of the Saints along with Life Everlasting. The Bible calls all Christians "Saints". ie- "holy" in Christ. When we pass away we do not cease to be Christians. Therefore, there are Saints in heaven as well as still on earth. We cared and prayed for each other when we were together here. Why should we cease doing that for those who are in Heaven now, even as we do for those who have moved and now live in another part of the country? However we unpack this teaching, we need to remember that the Church existed before our time and will continue after our time. It is composed of all Saints, past present and future. This unity of all Believers is essential to what the Church is. This unity is the Communion of the Saints that is rightly celebrated on this day in the Church calendar.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 07:39