

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
March 14/15, 2009
Third Sunday in Lent
“The Self-Discipline of Discipleship”

First, some thoughts about our reading from I Peter. [The web site of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita, Kansas, reminds us that:](#) “Many scholars think that I Peter was an ancient baptismal homily. Baptism is a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On Holy Saturday, many Christians will be baptized. ... Long ago, Noah and his family were “saved” through the water; now ... (this text says we are also) ... saved through the water of baptism. The whole world was “washed” by the flood; baptism is our washing away of sin. The reading speaks of Jesus going in the spirit to preach to the souls of those who had disobeyed ... (which) ... is expressed in the Apostles’ Creed by the words, “He descended into hell...” The reading alludes to our share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ through baptism: We must die to self in order to be glorified in Christ.

This Message started with some Biblical information taken from “Unit 58: The Petrine Letters” in the CROSSWAYS Bible Study, authored by Dr. Harry Wendt (Pages 599-603)

Secondly, some thoughts about our reading from Matthew.

Remember that last week I mentioned that our text was almost, word for word, identical in all three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Well, this week this text is unique. It is not found in Mark (written first) or in Luke ... it is unique to Matthew ... which means we need to remember what is going on in Matthew.

“the structure of matthew’s gospel” at <http://lectionary.wolsblog.com/> which hosts the “Disclosing New Worlds” blog I found this:

Look at Matt 1:23: “They shall name him ‘Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us’.”

Of course, Jesus is not actually named “Emmanuel”. This is a quotation from the (Greek Septuagint) version of Isaiah 7:14. It is a characteristic of Matthew that he presents the story of Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies and hopes.

Matthew tells his story of Jesus with reference to the Old Testament stories in order to show the connections between what God has done in the past and what God is doing in Jesus. This

is the sense in which Jesus is “Emmanuel”: he is the presence of God - both in the sense that he is the Son of God and also in the sense that he is God’s *continuing* presence with us: it is the *same* God who was “with us” in the Exodus, the creation and calling of Israel and the People of Yahweh, the Exile and return, and the One whose promised future was Israel’s hope. The constant reference back to the great stories of Israel’s faith is a way of showing both the continuity and discontinuity between the past and the present: both the way in which Jesus is part of the past and is also something “new”.

One way in which Matthew does this is his presentation of Jesus as the New Moses. Let’s look at a key example. Think, for a moment, of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew tells this story in a way that quite deliberately evokes memories of Israel at Sinai. Moses goes up the mountain. When Moses is on the mountain, Yahweh speaks and gives the Law. Moses then comes down the mountain as God’s mouthpiece, so that the “Law of Moses” is actually “The Law (and exact words) of Yahweh”. Moses’ authority lies in the fact that he has communed directly with God. He, alone of all mortals, has seen God; he has been given the words of God verbatim.

Now look at the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, like Moses, goes up a mountain. Unlike Moses, he doesn’t go to *get* the Law but to *give* the Law! He sits down and teaches. Jesus, then, is like Moses - but in Matthew’s story, Jesus also takes the place of Yahweh! Jesus gives the Law on his own authority. This is Matthew’s way of telling us, “Jesus is God!” This is the radically new, unthinkable bit. It is when we remember the old stories that we see the bits that don’t fit - the new things that break open the boundaries. And the new thing is that Jesus is giving the New Law (of the Kingdom) to the New Israel (the Church). Jesus is nothing short of God with us - Emmanuel.

The 5-fold structure of Matthew’s gospel

One way of picturing the structure of Matthew’s gospel is to see it as comprising 5 main blocks of speeches - discourses, each ending with the same formula: “When Jesus had finished saying all of these things, he ...”. Imagine these as 5 books on a shelf, with two bookends: the birth narrative and the passion narrative. It looks like this:

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| Bookend 1: | The Birth Narrative (chapters 1-2) |
| Chs 5-7 | The Sermon on the Mount |
| Ch 10 | Instructions to the disciples (the mission of the 12) |
| Ch 13 | Parables about response and judgement |
| Ch 18 | Instructions to the disciples (Christian community) |
| Chs 24-5 | Final discourse |

Bookend 2: The Passion Narrative (chapters 26-28)

Some commentators have suggested that we ought to read Matthew as using the 5 discourses to parallel the 5 books of the Pentateuch. One thing is clear: Matthew is writing a very “Jewish” gospel, shaped closely by the Old Testament and the tradition. As a rule of thumb, the more closely we see parallels between the “old” and the “new”, the more closely we are following Matthew’s thought and the more likely we are to spot the ways in which his narrative “works”.

So, **thirdly**, that brings us to today!

We have before us these two lessons: one from Jesus’ instructions to his disciples ... and the other a sermon from the baptismal service of the early Christian community ... and what they both say is this: to be baptized is to share in the life of Jesus ... yes ... but even more so, it is to share in the sufferings of Jesus.

The Christian life is not the proverbial “life of Riley” ... which may in itself need some definition. Some here may remember the background:

The Life of Riley, with [William Bendix](#) in the title role, was a popular American [radio situation comedy](#) series of the 1940s that was adapted into a 1949 [feature film](#) and continued as a long-running [television](#) series during the 1950s, originally with [Jackie Gleason](#) playing Bendix's role.

The show began as a proposed [Groucho Marx](#) radio series, *The Flotsam Family*, but the sponsor balked at what would have been essentially a straight head-of-household role for the comedian. Then producer [Irving Brecher](#) saw Bendix as taxicab company owner Tim McGuerin in the movie *The McGuerins from Brooklyn* (1942). *The Flotsam Family* was reworked with Bendix cast as blundering Chester A. Riley, a wing riveter at the fictional Cunningham Aircraft plant in California. His frequent exclamation of indignation became one of the most famous [catch phrases](#) of the 1940s: "What a revoltin' development *this* is!" The radio series also benefited from the immense popularity of a supporting character, Digby "Digger" O'Dell ([John Brown](#)), "the friendly undertaker."

The expression, "Living the life of Riley" suggests an ideal life of prosperity and contentment, possibly living on someone else's money, time or work. Rather than a negative freeloading or golddigging aspect, it instead implies that someone is kept or advantaged. The expression was popular in the 1880s, a time when [James Whitcomb Riley](#)'s poems depicted the comforts of a prosperous home life [1], but it could have an Irish origin: After the Reilly clan consolidated its hold on County Cavan, they minted their own money, accepted as legal tender even in England. These coins, called “O'Reillys” and “Reilly's,” became synonymous with a monied person, and a gentleman freely spending was “living on his Reillys.” Thus, the radio-TV title has an ironic edge.

Quite to the contrary, the Christian lives in the shadow of the Cross. Within this community, we know that Matthew 25:31-36 (The Message)

³¹⁻³³"When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

³⁴⁻³⁶"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

We know that the old saying is corrupted that says "there is no rest for the wicked" because, in the Scriptures, the wicked would probably be the ones resting while there is hunger, thirst, homelessness, nakedness, sickness, or crowded jails. We know that the saying really should go: "there is no rest for the righteous." At least, not in this life. Not in this world. Not in this religion. Not in this Church. Not if we are following this Christ.

But we also know that there is a REST ... a promised REST ... which will be forever ... and that is what keeps us going now. The HEREAFTER gives us strength for the HERE AND NOW.