

is the catchy, homophonic title of a sermon to be preached next Sunday by an East Coast pastor who was talking with me about it today. Another woman, who pastors on the West Coast, was talking with me an hour later about the same text, Jer.18, on which she'll be preaching next Sunday. Yes, both use the Common Lectionary as the scriptural base of their weekly struggle for homiletic food to feed the flock of God. Another of next Sunday's lections, L.12, says "Stop being afraid, little flock! Your Father wants to give you the kingdom." My impression is that next Sunday, neither woman's flock need fear that their pastor will not feed them.

I can only hope that this rambling Thanksheet will feed you. Typo: Read "Thanksheet." But a Thanksheet lacking the spirit of gratitude to God wouldn't be worth reading.

1 Synchronicity! Today I bumped into Jer.18 (God as Israel's potter) three times. First, in my diary of $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago today: I preached 45 minutes, my usual sermon length (despite Communion that Sunday), on Jer.18, "Is God Defeated?" Now read Jer.18.1-11 for yourself: what jumps out at you? What jumped out for me for my people in that Chicago church long ago was the relentlessness of responsive righteousness--responsive, because God is loving; relentless, because God is just: holy love suffering for & with sinners under the pressure of holy justice, the essential rectitude of God's nature & consequently the inexorability of the restoration of righteousness in God's creation. As I see it now, a right masculine message: God cannot be defeated by us; if we take a wrong shape, the divine potter re"kneads" the clay, then "forms it into another pot...as seems best to him" (vs.4, NIV: "reworking it into another vessel...as seems good to him," NRSV). The implicit hope is that the potter does not give up on the misshapen clay: in love, God does not give up on Israel, on us. Of course the analogy hobbles on three legs, for the fourth leg is our will: we are free to resist the divine "formation" of our inner & outer lives, but the result is self-destruction: that is the severe limit on our freedom, but the limit itself arises from the very source of our freedom: "Perfect liberty is perfect obedience to the perfect law" (Fosdick). Our Jer. passage concludes with an evangelistic plea: Repent (literally, "turn" to God) & "reform" (NIV; NRSV, "amend") your ways & your doings/actions.

2 My masculine reading was/is faithful to Jeremiah who, after the model of his God, was compassionate-masculine. I've not gotten my consciousness raised enough to do me any damage, but enough to raise questions I couldn't have imagined before. Like, what shape would my 2 Aug 92 sermon have taken had I been a woman? And, how would a woman today preach Jer.18? The second question is easier: I've definite clues as to how these two women will preach it next Sunday. Their feminine sermons will speak of trust, when the hard times come, that God is kneading us to prepare us to be vessels of compassion, wombs able to bear the world's woes--God, who knows we need to be needed & is preparing us to be better need-meeters with more satisfaction in the nurturing work of God's mother side, & ours. I've extrapolated from her title that something like that will be the older woman's sermon. The younger woman will draw comfort & strength for the Potter's trustability when the rough times come in our private & public lives, but she will accent (using the Heb.11.1-3,8-19 lection) that fourth leg that lets us walk aright, our faith-energized wills.

3 No, this is not homiletical sexual-role assigning! To fight off boredom, God squirts different proportions of estrogens & androgens in skinbags of the same sex, so we can't prejudicially lock any particular specimen, male or female, into a feeling-thinking-doing Gestalt labeled "masculine" or "feminine." Furthermore, one's hormonal proportions shift somewhat as we go through life: even if we get a good fix on somebody we know well, give it a little more time & that fix may no longer fit the facts. But we can speak generally without invidious generalization: scholars in the biology, psychology, & sociology of sexuality are increasingly asking us to recognize, & honor, fe/male differences. A homiletic conclusion is that it's not wise to listen to preaching only by one sex. (Since 1872 in the Craigville Tabernacle,

every season both women & men have preached: by conviction, not be accident.)

4 Back to the Common Lectionary. Yesterday I heard a Roman Catholic priest use, in his homily, all four of the Sunday lections. I know him to be a good man but a good preacher only when reading somebody else's sermon, which he did. The content was state-of-the-art scholarship, though he's no scholar, & the style had a joyful lilt God didn't give his soul. Obviously he was using material straight out of one of the many lectionary commentaries continuously published on the church year. And he added personal touches & applications: the sermon was not cold or distant or irrelevant to the flock's needs. I'm not recommending this practice for all preachers, or for any preacher all of the time. But how much better than a low-quality, dismal performance of "preachers" who aren't preachers but are programmed (& paid) to preach, or of the good preacher who occasionally hasn't had (ie, taken) the time to prepare adequately!....Even when the preacher does not lean so heavily on the lectionary commentaries, they are sources of excellent illustrative material.

5 Back to next Sunday's ecumenical lections. Preachers who take them seriously will stretch their minds to dope out the connections among the lections, a stretching I did for years in writing a paragraph for each Sunday in the brief lectionary commentary called KIRKRIDGE READINGS & INTENTIONS. Besides our pottery story (Jer.18.1-11), we have (1) Ps.14 (doing right, praying to God, obeying God who is with you in your obedience); (2) Heb.11.1-3,8-19 (faith); & (3) L.12.32-40 (unworried trust, eager readiness for the fullcome kingdom of God [in 35, 38, 40, the Greek word for "ready" includes inner fitness, resilient continuous adjustment to God's will]).

Of course sometimes the Spirit says "Forget the lectionary this Sunday!" But I think the Spirit usually asks the preacher to take the selections seriously, for these reasons: (1) The selecting has been done by experts in Scripture, the church year, & preaching; (2) Regular mental-spiritual attention to the lections saves the preacher from "dada" (French, "hobby-horse," hence the esthetic movement celebrating irrationality: it's irrational, as well as feeding the sheep a monotonous diet, to preach only from one's personal canon, ie one's favorite texts); & (3) Over the three-year cycle, virtually all the great texts are covered, & the desert spaces of the biblical terrain are circumvented, the spaces where there's little or no food.

6 Sometimes the preacher will abide in one of the four texts, with little or no reference to the others. The older of our two preachers seems headed in that direction. Sometimes the preacher draws from & refers to all four, or three, or two. Our younger preacher is doing a stretch over the Jer. & Heb. passages: Since Abraham's faith leads to Jeremiah's, what are the qualities of the former's faith that provide & sustain the vision & conviction one needs to persevere through repeated hard times, "kneadings"? Particularly she wants help on the Shekinah-Presence-Light-Illumination factor. I noted she was wearing a Yale sweatshirt with Yale's motto (in Hebrew), "Light and Truth"--literally, "lights," "luminaries," (resultantly) "illuminations"--+ the elative force of the intensive plural: "Light" from God is prerequisite to our seeing truth (the Heb. wd. meaning also moral truth, ie integrity, & thus wholeness, completeness, freedom from distortion or defect). Which introduces a final factor she wants to work in: Faith has eyes to see invisibles--its (KJV Heb.11.1) "the evidence of things not seen" (following Geneva & Bishops'--before which two, Tyndale & Great had "certainty" (cp. TEV & NIV's "certain"); the RV-ASV-RSV-NRSV tradition has "conviction"; & the earliest RC English has "the argument of things not appearing," followed by another RC version, viz JB: "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen." The sentence's two nodal words mean, literally: Faith "stands under" hope & "proves" the coming unseen, as (vs.3) God in *creating* visibilized his intention, as he did also in *calling* Abraham & through him *convening* the faith community whose history the rest of the Bible makes visible as "a light to the nations" (Is.42.6 [evangelism, missions, service]; v.9: "Fresh things...before they appear I tell you of them")...."I am the Light of the world" (Jn.8.12;9.5;cf.1.4; & Heb.1.3: the Son as "brightness," [act.] "radiance," [pass.] "reflection").