

Weekly Bible Study group – January 20, 2010

This week's reading: Revelation 1:9 – 3:22
Reflection by Bob Zurinsky (bob@spu.edu)

Over the last few years, I've had a few profound conversations with students (many of them at group or connected to group) about this really shocking idea of the Church as the "Body of Christ." This is a phrase that I grew up with, and over time it became rather common-place in my vocabulary. But then through this series of conversations here at SPU, I've begun to think about being the Body of Christ in a fresh way, and it's really very scandalous feeling!

What a bold, presumptuous claim. To say that Jesus Christ himself, God incarnate, has now entrusted his identity and his Spirit to *us*. After he was raised from dead, he ascended to the right hand of God. He is no longer here with us in body. But he said that WE are now his body. We are his body? We are *Christ on earth*? It almost feels heretical to type those words, but it seems that this is what we are supposed to believe.

So what does that have to do with the message of Revelation? Let me tell you what I think.

In tonight's passage, the letters to the 7 churches, we are introduced to the image of "one like a son of man standing in the midst of the lamp stands." The 7 lamp stands in this vision symbolize the 7 churches that John is writing to. John is delivering a harsh but hopeful word to these churches; a word that he says comes straight from Christ himself. But it's critical to read these letters in light of the opening scene...Christ is standing *among* the churches as he delivers this word. This isn't a message of rebuke from a distant God. The voice is coming from *within* and *among* the congregations themselves.

I wonder—have we even scratched the surface of this teaching that we *are* the Body of Christ, and that the same Spirit that was in Jesus now lives in *us*? In Revelation, there is some ambiguity about who is really speaking to these churches. Sometimes it's Jesus talking, and sometimes John says that these are the words that the Spirit is saying to the churches. But that ambiguity just helps to reinforce a shocking claim: the messages that God has to speak into the world today come from within and among us, because we are now *Christ's body*, and we are now *filled with the Spirit of God*.

All of this leads me to wonder: If we bear Christ among us, and if his Spirit is filling us – what are the ***new messages*** of hope and rebuke that God is wanting to speak through us and to us *today*?