

group Bible Study – October 11, 2006

Read Luke chapters 7-9

Reflection: Bob Zurinsky, Campus Ministries, bob@spu.edu

"The world has changed. I see it in the water. I feel it in the Earth. I smell it in the air." ~Treebeard

As I read Luke chapters 7-9, I keep hearing these words from Tolkien's masterpiece ringing in my mind. (But it's complicated.) As Treebeard is speaking these lines to Merry and Pippin, it's clear that this is a moment of tragedy. He's saying, in effect, that the world is ruined. That history has failed. So why the heck, I wonder, do I keep coming back to this when I read about Jesus in Luke? A little bit of background...

The whole Jewish and Christian story is deeply historical. It's about real things that God has done in our history past, and it's about real expectations for the future. The Jewish people of Jesus' day knew this all too well. They remembered the past – the great actions of God. And they also knew that the present sucked; that the enemies of God had all the power. And so they waited for something new in the future. For many of them, this meant that they were waiting for the 'messiah,' the one sent by God to save the people.

And then here comes Jesus onto the scene. He's curing diseases, raising the dead. And all the while he's quoting the great prophets of the past to show that *this* is connected to *that*: "Go and report what you have seen: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the poor have good news preached to them." (See Luke 7:22 – Jesus is quoting directly from the vision of the future in Isaiah 35:4-6.) These chapters in Luke send one big clear message: Jesus is fulfilling the ancient hopes – he's the one the people have been waiting for. It's finally *happening*. The time has come – no – GOD has come!

And yet... I sit here writing these thoughts 2,000 years later, and the world still sucks. Our countries are broken, our families are broken, our own minds and bodies are broken. Maybe Treebeard is right, and the world is just too far gone. Maybe it's over. Maybe evil has won. Everything in the world screams "broken" and a lot of people are responding with "screw it all." And, let's be honest, it looks like the whole "Jesus" thing didn't work... at least not the way people thought it should.

But when I read Luke, something is sparked in my soul, something that says "the world is changed, I smell it in the air" – but in a different way. I am reminded that this is a historical faith. And that means that it's about the past, present and future. Just like the Jewish people of the first century, we can legitimately say that the world is wrong, and we're waiting for something new to happen. And that's OK, because this story isn't over yet. There's more to come. And the world is changed because of Jesus (can you see it in the water and feel it in the earth?). But we're still *waiting* for the final act. Let's not forget the future. In Luke 9 we read about the transfiguration of Jesus, when "the appearance of his face became different, and his clothing became white and gleaming" (9:29). All throughout the scriptures we are reminded of the day when God's Glory will fill the earth, and all creation will live in his Spirit. For just a moment, the disciples caught a glimpse of that Glory. And then it was gone. We wait for the day when all the earth will see the unveiled Spirit of God once again – because on that day the world *will* be changed, once and for all.

Study Questions (for individuals or groups):

- Read Isaiah 35. Why would Jesus quote this passage when talking about his own ministry?
- So many miracles of Jesus in Luke 7-9. Why? What do you think is the point of all these signs and wonders?
- What do you believe about the past, present and future, and how does that affect the way you live?

Special Bonus: **Emily Dickinson** (A.D. 1830-1886)

I groped for him before I knew
With solemn nameless need
All other bounty sudden chaff
For this foreshadowed Food
Which others taste and spurn and sneer—
Though I within suppose
That consecrated it could be
The only Food that grows