

Job 7:1-4, 6-7
Ps 147:1-6. *R: Heal our broken hearts, O God. Bind up our wounds.*
1 Corinthians 9:1-14
Mark 1:29-34

The Lectionary and Deception:
How the Lectionary Shapes – or Limits - Faith and Religious Practice
February 5, 2012 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Our faith has been shaped by the Lectionary. So has our religious practice. Not long ago, our associate pastor Rod Stephens said he hadn't realized until he experienced MMACC how much the Lectionary can manipulate our faith. One reading this week provides a crucial example of how the Lectionary has impacted faith and religious practice; but, first, a few words about the lectionary we are developing at MMACC.

Our Assistant Pastor, Nancy Corran, and I recently spent two days working on MMACC's Inclusive Lectionary. We outlined our goals: (1) to include the most significant stories about and references to women in the Bible; (2) to include foundational texts of the Bible; (3) to include a broad spectrum of Biblical texts, whether or not their theologies agree with orthodox Christian theology; (4) to focus on gospel passages unique to Matthew, Luke and John; and (5) follow the Roman Catholic lectionary unless one of the above goals requires a departure. We agreed we have accomplished our first goal. We agreed we need to know our past, for better or worse, in order to understand our present and creatively imagine the future. We believe this approach will unveil theological differences among early Christian writers, and between Biblical theologies and the 4th-5th century orthodoxy which current magisterial theology endorses and the canonical lectionary supports.

Our lectionary for today includes the canonical readings from Job, Psalm 147 and the core piece of the gospel. A theme which ties these readings together is the divine capacity to "heal the broken hearted and bind up their wounds." In each, we find the metaphor of cosmic creator as cosmic physician, or Jesus as healer, tending to the wounded creation.

The canonical gospel includes the healing of Peter's mother-in-law but combines it with two other gospel passages, thereby emphasizing Jesus' healing mission. This approach overlooks that, in Mark's gospel, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law is the *first* healing miracle of the gospel. A woman is the *first* recipient of Jesus' healing.¹ These details reflect the importance of women in Jesus' mindset and ministry. In addition, the first recipient of Jesus' healing is not any woman, but the mother of Peter's wife – for without a wife, there is no mother-in-law! MMACC's lectionary for this week focuses on these details by substituting the passage from 1st Corinthians read today.

¹ Biblical scholars distinguish between healing miracles and exorcisms as in Mark 1:21-28.

Written possibly as early as twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion, 1 Corinthians 9:5 makes it utterly clear that the apostles, Jesus' brothers, and Peter were married, facts which the magisterium would deny. The context for Paul's statement is a conflict about Paul in the Corinthian church. Apparently, the church has been influenced to believe that Paul was not an apostle and not entitled to the privileges of an apostle. The privileges of an apostle Paul mentioned include: (1) the right to eat and drink; (2) the right to travel with "our wives," at least if they are Christian; and (3) the right not to work, that is, the right to receive material goods in exchange for their missionary work. In 1 Corinthians 9:1-14, Paul defends his apostleship. Other apostles may have told the Corinthians that *because* Paul didn't exercise apostolic privileges, because he didn't regularly accept food from his churches or travel with a Christian wife or accept money or material goods in exchange for his preaching, Paul wasn't *really* an apostle. Paul responded that the Corinthians were living proof of his apostleship; that he freely chose to work to earn his living; that although he chose not to exercise apostolic privileges, he was, nonetheless, as entitled to them as the other apostles. In making his defense, Paul leaves behind this powerful evidence that the apostles, the brothers of Jesus, and Peter were married.

The canonical church prefers texts from 1 Corinthians about virginity² in which Paul seems to opine that being unmarried is better than marrying, unless one was already married when one came to Christian faith. It's likely Paul's position regarding "virginity" was based, not on an absolute preference for virginity, but on his belief that the world as they knew it was about to end.³

On Paul's seeming preference for virginity and the false assertion that the apostles were unmarried, the Roman Catholic magisterium built a theology and religious practices: God prefers the unmarried state to the married state; to be a leader in the Roman Catholic church, one must not marry; being unmarried theoretically means the absence of sexual activity; the absence of sex leaves one more pure to offer the "sacrifice" in the Christian "Temple." This theological construct and its resulting practices collapsed among 16th century Reformers in the face of Scripture. Marriage became the rule among Protestant ministers. Marriage was also preferred in ancient Israelite and Judean religion and culture.⁴

Paul's words about virginity, taken out of context, shaped our theology and practice for approximately 1600 years. MMACC's Sunday lectionary includes this passage with 1 Corinthians 9:5 which, alongside the Gospel reading, confirms the understanding of the evangelist that Peter had a mother-in-law, and therefore a wife. Together they make clear that celibate priesthood is unnecessary to Christian leadership. By eliminating 1 Corinthians 9:5 from the lectionary, the magisterium not only shaped our faith but perpetrated a multifaceted, theological deception on believers with major institutional consequences.

² See, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, the canonical reading for Cycle B, the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

³ See 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, the canonical reading for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

⁴ Although early Israelite practice permitted men to have multiple wives. Women, however, were permitted only one husband.

The lectionary is necessary. It's impossible to read every Scripture passage on a Sunday without making the lectionary cycle many years long. Some Biblical passages represent marginal theological perspectives that shouldn't constitute part of our regular Scriptural diet. But the Lectionary is also a powerful tool, one that can exclude theological views and historical evidence contradictory to orthodox belief and practice. Excluding evidence that the apostles were married helped develop and perpetuate a clerical system which excluded married people and women. Sadly, we know too well that this clerical system did not, and does not, equate celibacy with virginity. Rather it covered up the sinful sexuality of the clergy, promoting sex without responsibility.

At MMACC we strive to explore Scripture as fully as possible, the good and the bad, passages that support orthodoxy and passages that demonstrate theological views inconsistent with orthodoxy. All are, nonetheless, Biblical. At MMACC, we strive to make the lectionary a tool which liberates us to be faithful but intelligent believers, not uncritical mirrors of orthodoxy. We seek to expose deception and move toward a spectrum of beliefs available in Scripture.