

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 11

July 19, 2009

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 23

Ephesians 2:11-22

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

**A Funny Thing Happened
on the Way to Mark's Gospel**

In classical Greek, the rare and tongue-twisting Greek verb *splanchnizesthai* had a root meaning of “dining on the innards of an animal that had just been sacrificed.” But on the way to Mark's Gospel, a funny thing happened to this jaw-breaking verb: it lost its guts, so to speak. When Mark found this word in his own Koine Greek lexicon, it had mostly shed any association with pagan Greek religion and turned into an expression for divine pity. It had been upgraded to an attribute of God and, by extension, to a divine quality in human beings.

A Hellenistic Jewish writing called *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* cheers on this lexical process, perhaps even sparks it. There, *splanchnizesthai* stands for God's compassion toward people and people's compassion toward one another. In choosing just this word, the writer puts a stamp on real compassion: it wells up from deep inside us. It's not just worn on the skin. What's more, true compassion embraces risks and takes direct action on behalf of others. The patriarch Zebulon says to his tribe:

“And now, my children, have compassion for every human being so that the Lord will also have compassion on you. In the last days, God will shower the earth with mercy and whenever God finds people who have shown compassion to others God will make a home in them. For the Lord will have the same amount of compassion on you that you have on others.”

Searching for a word to illustrate Jesus' feelings toward sick and outlawed people, Mark found *splanchnizesthai* (Mark 1:41). When he needed a full-throated word to describe Jesus' feelings about the human hunger that surrounded him in the form of 5,000 people longing for food, he used it again (Mark 6:34). But Jesus' feelings authored actions: Jesus healed the leper and restored him to life in community. Jesus fed the 5,000 and made it possible for them to digest not only bread and fish but his teaching.

Luke also seized upon this expression, giving it a central place in his stories of compassionate love for others. In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), a father surrenders his anger and rushes to meet a lost son who has returned home after squandering his share of an inheritance. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), a Samaritan (an enemy of the Jews in biblical times) flouts convention and expectation. Overcome by *splanchnizesthai*, he takes pity on a brutally injured Jewish traveler by bandaging the traveler's wounds and leaving him in the care of a local inn keeper.

The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs reveals that *splanchnizesthai* restructures our lives in a gut-wrenching way. God, it seems, logs our deeds of compassion. At the end of time God opens this log to determine the measure of compassion we will receive. No surprise, then, that Jesus' own teaching reckons with God's calculus for compassion. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus famously says to his Father, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."

This week's Reflection was prepared by Robert Hodgson, Jr., Ph.D., Dean Emeritus of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Uruguay – With prayers for Scripture projects that address the issues of abortion, domestic violence, and AIDS, and that are aimed at marginalized people, young people, university students, and those involved in street gangs; **Paraguay** – With prayers for El Amanecer, the boat that is used to bring social and spiritual ministry to people living along the Paraguay River, and with thanks to God for the schools that have been built for them and for the faith and courage of the crew, and with prayers for young people who feel lost amid the political and social upheavals in the country, that they will find meaning and direction through the Word of God; **Venezuela** – With thanks to God for increased Scripture distribution, and with prayers for *Pan de Vida* in areas plagued by violence, for projects concerned with education, for the Piaroa Bible translation project, and that God's Word may foster reconciliation between people; **Brazil** – With thanks to God for last year's success of the *Year of the Bible* campaign which mobilized millions around the Scriptures, and with prayers that their engagement with the Bible will last, and with prayers that this year's emphasis on audio Scriptures will help people to engage with God's Word, applying it to their daily lives.

Activity Corner: "Compassionate Words"

Supplies needed: Writing papers; pens or pencils; dictionary (optional)

Using the letters from the word C-O-M-P-A-S-S-I-O-N, make at least 15 words of four or more letters each. Three-letter words that add "s" to make them plural do not count. Set a time limit of 10-15 minutes.

For an additional challenge, form words of four or more letters each from the Greek word S-P-L-A-N-C-H-N-I-Z-E-S-T-H-A-I.