

Bible Tuesday for Lent III, 2019

Isaiah 55:1-9

Ho, all who are thirsty come for water. Even if you have no money, come, buy food and eat. Buy food without money, wine and milk without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, your earnings for what does not satisfy? Give heed to Me, and you shall eat choice food and enjoy the richest viands. Incline your ear and come to Me; hearken, and you shall be revived. And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the enduring loyalty promised to David. As I made him a leader of peoples, a prince and commander of peoples, so you shall summon a nation you did not know, and a nation that did not know you shall come running to you. For the sake of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel who has glorified you. "Seek the Lord while He can be found. Call to Him while He is near. Let the wicked give up his ways and the sinful man his plans; Let him turn back to the Lord and he will pardon him, to our God for he freely forgives. For my plans are not your plans nor are my ways your ways," declares the Lord. "But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways high above your ways and my plans above your plans."

This passage comes from "Third Isaiah", which is the hopeful, celebratory part of the prophecy which was written for the Israelites leaving exile in Babylonia to return to the Promised Land. Despite the passage's historical context, the writing is much more general and can be applied to redemption of many types.

This passage is metaphorical in nature, interpreted by rabbis throughout the centuries as an invitation to return to God and to Torah. "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." This passage invites not only returning exiles, but all who have wandered from God, to return and feast upon God's covenant with all creation.

"Promised to David" – God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel forever. That promise was not true when Israel was in captivity in Babylonia. In this passage, God restates the covenant but in a different way. No longer will Israel have a human king, but each Israelite will be God's princes and princesses.

Finally, God makes clear that God creates and sees the big picture, while we can only see the time and space we occupy.

Psalm 63:1-8

God, You are my God. I search for you. My soul thirsts for You, my body yearns for You as a parched and thirsty land that has no water. I shall behold You in the sanctuary, and see Your might and glory. Truly Your faithfulness is better than life; my lips declare Your praise. I bless You all my life. I lift up my hands, invoking Your name. I am sated as with a “rich feast” [of suet and fat]. I sing praises with joyful lips when I call You to mind upon my bed, when I think of You in the watches of the night, for You are my help and in the shadow of Your wings I should for joy.

This psalm is entitled “A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” The Israelites throughout their history have spent a lot of time in parched, barren wildernesses. How fitting to describe their need for God as a physical yearning for water.

“I shall behold You in the sanctuary and see Your might and glory.” Some scholars believe the psalmist is picturing an image of Yahweh in a temple such as pagan temples had. However, no such statue of Yahweh was ever in the Temple in Jerusalem, since this is a blatant violation of the Ten Commandments.”

“Your faithfulness is better than life.” - God is always faithful to the covenant God made with Abraham, all Israel, and all creation.

“Watches of the night” – In biblical times, night was divided into three or four watches, when sentries were set to keep watch for enemies.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the same spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil, as they did. Do not become

idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and they rose to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So, if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

This passage is part of Paul’s argument with the congregation in Corinth concerning food offered to idols. In Roman society, as in Jewish religious practices, live animals were offered as sacrifices to the gods. The temple priests and priestesses would take some of the sacrificed animals for their own food but the rest was sold in the market place to fund the temples and their staff. Therefore, the meat sold in Roman marketplaces was frequently meat sacrificed to idols. Eating this meat was absolutely forbidden under Jewish Law. However, these new Corinthian Christians knew that these pagan gods were pure idols and did not exist, therefore, some of them argued that eating the meat was just fine, while others of them argued that it was against Jewish law therefore against Christian law. Paul affirms that there are no such things as idols so the meat is fine to eat, except that it offends some of the congregation so why not act in the best interests of the whole congregation and get meat from other sources or not eat it at all?

Then Paul uses the issue to discuss how food may and may not affect one’s relationship with God, congregation, community, and creation.

In this case, “under the cloud” does not mean “under a cloud of suspicion” but rather, “under the cloud” of God’s guidance through the Sea of Reeds and the Sinai Wilderness. Because they followed Moses, who followed God in the cloud, through the Sea of Reeds, Paul is here saying that they were baptized into God’s covenant. In addition, all Israel ate manna in the morning and quail in the evening, which God brought to them, which Paul is here equating with a kind of Holy Communion. When in the wilderness, there was a time when Israel could not find water and much grumbling against Moses and God ensued. God told

Moses to whack a rock with his staff. When Moses did, water gushed out of the rock, enough for all Israel to drink. As Brian J. Whitfield writes in his "Working Preacher" article, "Like the manna, that gift of water was not a solitary event. Paul, as later rabbis will do, argues the Israelites kept on drinking because the spiritual rock followed them (10:3-4). Because Paul knows Jewish traditions that Wisdom directed the exodus and because he identifies Christ as the Wisdom of God (1:24), he concludes that "the rock was Christ" (10:4)

Paul then gives five warnings based on the fate that befell the sinful Israelites. 1) Do not desire evil. 2) Do not be idolaters, for it is easy to worship yourself or your righteousness and trick yourself into thinking you are worshiping God. Selfless care of neighbor is a good way to guard against this. 3) The warning against sexual immorality is tied to the first warning. Paul refers to an incident during the Israelite wandering when 23,000 Israelite men went into Moab, slept with their women and engaged in idol worshiping (which included sex acts). God struck all 23,000 down to keep them from polluting the rest of Israel. 4) Do not test Christ. Paul is referring to the wilderness incident when Israelites were grumbling against God and Moses, and God sent snakes among the people, who were getting bit and dying. God told Moses to fashion a bronze snake and put it on a pole in the middle of camp. When the people were bit, they were to turn and look at the bronze snake and would be healed of the bite. This was a redirection of faithlessness to faithfulness. Paul is adjuring the Israelites to not test God with arguments over food, but rather live in compassion and faithfulness. 5) Complain and be destroyed. God got so fed up with the faithlessness and complaining of the Israelites that God declared, "None of you who were slaves in Egypt shall live to see the Promised Land. I will not allow you to enter until you are all dead and only your children and grandchildren are alive."

Paul concludes by stating that this meat issue is testing the congregation in Corinth and so far they are failing. This simple issue is dividing the congregation and causing them to become self-focused instead of uniting them in compassion with one another and faithful service to God.

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus asked them, “Do you think that because those Galileans suffered in this way that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Then Jesus told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find no fruit! Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” The gardener replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

In this passage, Jesus is refuting a commonly held belief among Jews that people deserved what they got, and what they got was from God. Rich people and healthy people were rich and/or healthy because God was rewarding them for faithfulness. Conversely, poor people and sick people were poor and/or sick because God was punishing them for the evil they perpetrated. God may even visit these punishments and rewards on the next generation or so. Instead of affirming this messed up belief, Jesus puts the scrutiny back where it belongs, on the self. “Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Remember, repent means to change your direction. Here the disciples are pointing the finger at others whom they believe God is punishing instead of looking at themselves. “Don’t pick at the speck in your brother’s eye until you pull the log out of your own!”

The fig tree is a common symbol for the whole people of Israel throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, this parable is about Israel. God is the vineyard owner and Jesus is the gardener. (“But Mary, supposing he was the gardener, said, ‘Where have you laid him?’”) God planted Israel in the choice garden of Canaan and came looking for fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord, joy in God’s presence, but found NONE! “Cut the

damned thing down!” demands God. “Why should it be taking up this perfect space I intend for a faithful, loving people?!” Jesus responds, “Give me one year of ministry, one year of teaching, preaching, healing, loving, and dying and rising. If after one year they still reject you, then do with them as you choose.”

Thus Jesus has warned the disciples. “You are to look at yourselves and how you are unfaithful to God, why you are not bearing the fruit God has planted you to bear. I am here to teach you this very thing, but I will not always be with you. Unless you change, all of you will be very far from God and that life is not one you want to live.”