

Lent 3C, 2010

Lections: Isaiah 55:1-9; Ps. 63:1-8; 1 Corin. 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

We are at midpoint in our Lenten journey, a good time to make course corrections, to assess how we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the risen life of Jesus in ourselves, checking in with each other about the house churches, the vestry meeting last week, the diocesan day of prayer and the upcoming Seder meal. I am wondering about the things that God is revealing to us about our pilgrimage time.

Earlier this week I met with a student who had gone with us to New Orleans. During a community meeting while we were there she bluntly stated, "I don't believe in God." Whoa, I thought, how did you get on this trip? What did you write in your essay? Perhaps like those who questioned Jesus in today's gospel, she had seen the innocent suffer and asked where was God? Perhaps she had looked at the church – local or denominational – and decided that it (we) had failed miserably to live as Christian community. Maybe she had given up on saying her prayers. But it seems God has other plans for her. She was somewhat stunned herself to be reaching out via facebook and asking for me to listen to what has happened. Rising early she had accompanied the work crew to the Ash Wednesday liturgy and found herself marked with a large black cross on her forehead which she wore all day while kneeling on the floor (all day) to prepare the tiles for Mr. Hammond's rooms. With some degree of amazement she said the only songs on her lips were those from church camp, old hymns that reassured her of God's grace and love. She has rejoined herself to the pilgrim community and she will be preaching on Palm Sunday at the Lutheran Church in New Edinborough where we held the commissioning liturgy the night before we went to Louisiana.

Lent is traditionally a time when catechumens, seekers of a committed faith, presented themselves to a season of preparation for Easter baptism. Clergy, laity, and even the bishop tried to comfort and encourage them by submitting themselves to the same disciplines of preparation. This solidarity asks the whole community to be attentive to the soul work, to live at least for a season, the life befitting the body of Christ. It is not meant to be a solitary journey but one taken with others, in community.

This year there have been opportunities to do that work together in the house church gatherings. (Here the parish was asked for some insights in the process so far). Yesterday the diocese offered a whole day on the language and tools of prayer; the keynote speaker was a Benedictine monk and there were six workshops including embodied prayer and contemplation. We were also blessed by opening and closing worship which stretched us into new songs, new ways of claiming the text. All of the baptized are called to continual conversion, to go deeper, to be reclaimed. I know that World day of prayer services were also held this past week.

We could look at all of our texts today as opportunities for prayer, to discover those attitudes and questions where we as a community are being met by God.

The disciples come to Jesus wondering if bad things happen to bad people – the mixing of the blood with the blood of sacrifice, the falling of the tower of Siloam; was it the fault of ‘those people?’ The Rev. Pat Robertson has decided that the people of Haiti were in some ways responsible for the earthquake and its devastation. “They made a pact with the devil some time ago,” he said in an address available on Youtube. Would he, did he, say the same about the people of Chile, about New Orleans, about all catastrophes large and small that happen to others?

Jesus asks all of his listeners to take a place of solidarity with others. We are all in need of repentance, he says; we all need to turn, to be reclaimed. We are all invited to stand with others, with all who seek God. Paul tells his listeners that trials and testing come to everyone and that God will provide a way through them. Sometimes I know that the body of Christ, the community of faith, is the only way through; we have each other.

We all want to be good, to live as people of faith – even if it takes some time to be fruitful. We do not want to be like the tree that the owner wants cut down because it has not yet offered fruit. Yes, there could be a symbolic way of interpreting the three years, as if the witness of Jesus had not born fruit in his listeners, but I am thinking it is also about us. The gardener is willing to advocate patience, an aerating of the roots, a liberal dose of fertilizer, a pattern of intensive care and attention, and time. I am glad that God is patient with us, even if there is a hint of a deadline in the gospel.

Are we willing to give up judging others and allow ourselves to look in the mirror of our own arrogance, our conviction that our individual faith life is superior and has no need of community? Are we able to claim that God is the source, the place where hungers and thirsts are truly met and that we might see God in each other? Could we understand that even in the business of the church, our annual meeting, we are held next to texts, to hymns, to the Eucharist, to prayer, that these patterns distinguish us from simply business as usual?

On March 18th we will welcome our neighbors to an interfaith freedom seder. In every generation oppressive forces affect the lives of many. There are groups who were never meant to survive. We have an opportunity to stand in solidarity with God’s tending and care of all of creation. In Holy Week there are opportunities for healing, for honoring the days of Jesus, our own needs and God’s yearning for us. This is a holy time for all pilgrims of faith, a holy season when we, too, might find ourselves on our knees, living into what has marked and claimed us. I look forward to joining you.

Amen+

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