

Reflections

Connecting the True Word to Real Life

Lent 3: March 17-23, 2019



A Word of Introduction

Welcome to the third week of Lent. This week we overhear promises God made to the People of Israel at a time when they were strangers in a foreign land. The Psalm offers a word of praise for promises fulfilled and the Gospel reading offers an encounter with a question many people ask, but seldom find a satisfying answer in response. The reflections that follow are based on the Revised Common Lectionary- a collection of scripture readings designed to take churches through the broad sweep of scripture over the course of three years. By studying these passages you will be joining a multitude of Christians around the globe who are reading the same parts of the Bible that you are. You can, of course, do these readings on your own and gain great benefit. Greater benefit still can be achieved by joining others to share your thoughts and reflections. Feel free to use these questions as a starting point for your own small group discussion. If there is enough interest I would be willing to lead or sit in with small groups when my schedule allows. Contact me via e-mail at dbagley@michiganumc.org to indicate your interest. You can also receive a daily dose of the reflections below along with some additional material by checking our Greater Southwest District Facebook Page each day. Again this week I've included a couple of prayers for morning and evening that you might wish to lift up. These too are taken from "Feasting on the Word".

Passages for the Week

Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalm 63:1-8, I Corinthians 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9

Prayers for the Week:

Morning Prayer

Gracious God,
this new day carries the potential for growth and new life.
Help me to attend to those things in me
that need care and attention.
Sow your word in me
that I may grow in faithfulness and understanding.
Shake me out of dull routines,
so that I may take part in the good news
you continue to tell urgently and passionately.
In Christ's name, Amen.

Evening Prayer

God of my life, as I lie down this night in the shadow of your wings,
I know that you will be with me even as you have helped me through this day.
Whether I am weary from the day, or whether the day has been a rich feat of blessings,
I give thanks for you power and glory, which are present in every circumstance.

As I give myself over to rest and sleep, I remember that your steadfast love is better than life. So, I pray, surround me with your love tonight and always. In the peace of Christ I pray. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Day One: Monday, March 18

My Thoughts are Not Your Thoughts - Read Isaiah 55:1-9.

-This vision of future restoration speaks to the people of Israel as they are waiting to return from the Exile. The vision lifted up here is one of restoration that is more than they could expect or imagine. Some would also add, more than they deserve. It is a promise of bountiful provision and restoration that places Israel in position where the people receive material benefit and political prominence. This view of salvation is attractive but does not fit the vision with which Christians are most familiar. Salvation and material benefit intertwine in Isaiah's prophecy. Has this been your experience? Does our faith assure us a prosperous future?

-In this passage the prophet asks, "Why do you spend money and labor for that which does not satisfy?" Why does Isaiah consider buying and consuming a waste of time? When is enough enough? How do you know? Is our society really "eating what is good?" How about your church? To what end do you work? What gives you true satisfaction?

Day Two: Tuesday, March 19

A Satisfied Soul - Read Psalm 63:1-8

-When the Psalms were collected the editors added the heading, "Of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah," to this Psalm. Setting it within this context helps readers to relate it to their own "wilderness" experiences. These experiences may not come in the form of a season in the desert, but may be found when we encounter a season of doubt, fear, illness or other personal struggle. How can affirmations like those found here sustain you in "wilderness times"?

-The Psalmist equates a longing for God with thirst. How is this description an accurate metaphor? How does worship ease this spiritual thirst? What about worship is most refreshing to your soul?

-In verse 4 the Psalm describes an attitude of prayer. How do you pray? Does posture and position of your body matter as you seek to connect to God? Are some attitudes of prayer better for you? Why do you think this is?

-Does your soul, "cling to God"? What would have to happen to make you comfortable with the notion of clinging to God if you're not already?

Day Three: Wednesday, March 20

Tests, Character and Endurance - Read I Corinthians 10:1-13

-Testing can reveal true character and level of commitment. What tests have you endured in your lifetime? How did these shape your character and change you level of commitment? What do you think others would observe in you as you pass through a time of trial?

Do Christians still practice idolatry, engage in immorality or complain? What forms do these things take? How would you apply Paul's counsel in this passage to those situations?

Day Four: Thursday, March 21

Unless You Repent - Read Luke 13:1-5

-What do you think people in Jesus' time believed was the reason for human suffering? What explanations do we have for suffering today? How do these explanations satisfy us? What questions do they leave?

-What did Jesus say about the relationship between sin and suffering? What does he invite his hearers to do in response to the situation described in this passage?

Day Five: Friday, March 22

The Fig Tree- Read Luke 13:1-9

-We are called to conduct our lives so that we are not afraid to stand before God. If you knew you would die tomorrow, would you do anything differently today? Is fear of Judgment the primary incentive for living faithfully? What motivates you to live faithfully?

-Luke 13:1-9 tells the story of a fruitless fig tree that the owner is ready to cut down. The gardener, however, asks for a little more time. The gardener wants to tend and cultivate the soil in the hope that figs may yet grow. The gardener is open to a different future for this tree, in spite of its present condition. Think about your own life, or the life of someone you love in relationship to this story: What needs special tending? What will cultivate the "soil" of daily life so that new growth and new possibilities might emerge? And what can we learn from this gardener about advocating for a different outcome, a new possibility?

Responding to the Word

Lent is a time for patience and reflection. People often use the days of Lent to turn from self-centeredness toward a more God-centered life. Spend some time today thinking about how sinful behavior (that is words, attitudes and actions that are out of synch with God's best intent for our relationship to the Creator, the creation and one another) causes harm. How does it harm your relationship with others and with God? How does this behavior harm you? How can you begin to

live differently? How might you demonstrate a renewed commitment to God? What is one thing you can do this week to more closely match your thoughts with God's thoughts and your ways with God's ways?