

Sunday, March 20, 2022
Third Sunday of Lent
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Isaiah 55:1-9

To those who have experienced long years in exile, the return to their homeland is a celebration of abundant life. God calls them into an everlasting covenant of love. Those who return to God will enjoy new life and forgiveness, because God's ways are not our ways.

¹Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
⁷let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Text Questions

Who deserves to eat and drink? Who does God invite to this abundance? (verse 1) What is God's question about how we spend our money? (verse 2) What kind of food are we invited/instructed to eat? Is this a meal of bread crusts and water? When you think of rich food that satisfies our hunger, what do you think of? What is the promise God is making? (verse 3) Who is included in this promise that once was made to David? (verse 4) Who are the nations that are called to this banquet, and who receive this promise? (verse 5) Who are the agents of this remarkably universal promise? In our country and our culture (and not just ours—most of the world), the people who deserve to eat really good, rich food are only the people who can afford to buy it. One of the things that happens when we humans identify enemies is that we believe they can be starved out. The riches that we are invited to share with the world include not only food, but food that is good for us and that nourishes our bodies, as well as our spirits. Is there anyone who should not eat, or who should not be able to feed their children? Why or why not?

Psalm 63:1-8

O God, eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you. (Ps. 63:1)

¹O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and
weary land where there is no water.

²**Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place,
that I might behold your power and your glory.**

³For your steadfast love is better than life itself;
my lips shall give you praise.

⁴**So will I bless you as long as I live
and lift up my hands in your name.**

⁵My spirit is content, as with the richest of foods,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,

⁶**when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the night watches.**

⁷For you have been my helper,
and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

⁸**My whole being clings to you;
your right hand holds me fast.**

Text Questions

The psalmist describes what it is like for people to long for God as they thirst for water and faint for food “in a dry and weary land.” (verse 1) So where do they look to see God? (verse 2) What do they long to see? It is hard to imagine life without God’s love. How does the psalmist describe the love of God? (verse 3) How do they praise and bless God? (verse 4) The psalmist describes God’s love as being filled as after a banquet. (verse 5) How do they praise God? Have you ever been unable to sleep? What does the psalmist tell us to do? (verse 6) Why are we to praise God and

rejoice in God's love? (verse 7) What would happen if God were to let go of us? (verse 8) How do you "cling" to God's love?

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Paul uses images from Hebrew Scriptures and prophecy to speak the truth of Jesus Christ: He is our rock, our water, our food, and our drink. Christ is the living sign of God's faithfulness.

¹I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These 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. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No 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.

Text Questions

Paul describes how God cared for “our ancestors,” the people of Israel, who may not be our ancestors by genealogy, but certainly by faith. How did God lead them out of Egypt? (verse 1—see Exodus 13:17-14:25) He calls their crossing the Red Sea as baptism into Moses. (verse 2) What spiritual food did they eat? (verse 3—see Exodus 16) What spiritual drink did they drink? (verse 4—see Exodus 17:1-7) Why was God not pleased with them? (verse 5—see Exodus 32) Why does Paul remind the people of these things? (verse 6) What does Paul warn them against? (verses 7-11) What does Paul say about the testing the Corinthians feel they are experiencing? (verses 12-13) How will God’s promises help us in these situations?

Gospel

Luke 13:1-9

Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.

¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.²[Jesus] asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come

looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' ⁸He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' "

Text Questions

Jesus is told of a particularly cruel and brutal action by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. (verse 1) What did some think of how they died? (verse 2) He uses another example. (verse 4) Why do terrible things happen? (verses 3, 5) Do you think God punishes us for our evil deeds? What do we have to repent of? Will repentance save us from death, perhaps especially a violent death? Jesus' comment on this is in the parable he tells. What did the owner of the vineyard want the gardener to do to the barren fig tree? (verses 6-7) What did the gardener do instead? (verse 8) Who do you think wants to get rid of us if we don't bear the right kind of fruit, or don't bear fruit at all? I can imagine the next year the gardener saying, "just one more year!" Does God's patience with us ever run out? What is your response to God's patient tending to us?