

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, March 7, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

Third Sunday in Lent 2010

A purpose for living

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Exodus 3:1-15

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

The polls open in about twelve hours. I am spending the last few hours of my campaign collecting my thoughts and trying to be patient with MYSELF. I have worked very hard and a lot of people have worked very hard on my behalf. A dear friend died this week and it knocked me back into reality. Elections come and go and little changes. People are born and die and it changes a lot for so many people. We lose a friend, a supporter, a father, a child, a servant, a character, a son, a daughter, a teacher, a husband, a wife, a pillar of strength and we MISS them. It is ironic that, when someone dies, it makes us appreciate the various roles that they play in our lives. "The world is a stage..." and WE play many parts in our lives. Will we be "missed" when we die? Life is fleeting as is fame. What is our "purpose" for living? At the end, all we have are memories and a legacy. A funeral is for the living. All is futility other than relationships and reputation. Few of us will be recorded in the history books. All will be remembered while those who live have memory. The attendance at our funeral is mostly determined by the weather. As Yogi Berra said, "If you don't go to peoples' funerals, you can't expect them to go to yours." You don't have time to appreciate someone important in your life? TAKE THE TIME while you still can. Eternity is long and life is short. Remember, we are going to be dead a lot longer than we are going to be alive. "If only" are the most tragic words in the English language. These passages are about "mission" and "ministry" and being "fruitful" with the time we are allocated. "Tempis fugit" (Time flies). Use it wisely.

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove

the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM Who I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

***This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.***

This passage represents the “formal call” of Moses to “deliver his people” from bondage in Egypt. Moses’ life could be roughly divided into three parts: thirty years as a “prince of Egypt”, thirty years as a “shepherd” tending his father-in-laws sheep and learning about the Midian desert and thirty years leading the Israelites to the “Promised Land” given to “Father Abraham”. How does God “prepare” us for great challenges? How do we “learn how to serve”? I believe that God was preparing Moses for SIXTY years so that he could SERVE most effectively for the LAST THIRTY years. Is God preparing me for some “great ministry”? What will that “ultimate ministry” look like? Chances are I won’t know until it is happening. Note that Moses had to “go to the mountain of God”. He had to seek the presence of God? (“Horeb” might be translated as “desert” or “isolation”). God sent a “burning bush” to talk to Moses. What “sign” will God show to me that will set me upon my “challenge of a lifetime”? As in the Biblical record, I DON’T GET TO CHOOSE MY MINISTRY, God will choose it for me and “call me” to it. How many of us have “chosen a profession” and hated it? How many people do we know who are actually practicing a profession that they learned “in college”? Most people simply “find themselves” in a line of work

because of outside forces and opportunity. Is God “in” opportunity? Is a “new door’s opening” OUR “burning bush”? Happy is the person who finds a “job” that they enjoy so much that they would do it for free. “Find something to do that you love and you will never work a day.” The great challenge in life is “growing where we are planted”. WE have choices that plants do not. If we are not “happy” where we are, MOVE, GET GOING, DO SOMETHING NEW, REACH OUT and “get to the ‘mountain’ of God”. Complaining about our “job” serves no useful purpose. Did Moses “enjoy” being a shepherd? We know he did not “enjoy” being the leader of the constantly complaining Israelites. Leadership is seldom “fun” for any leader because people always see things differently than others. A leader must “keep his/her own counsel” without abandoning their basic values “set”. IF God is our basic “value set”, then it is to God that we are ultimately responsible. If it is the “voter” who gives us “power”, it is to the “voters” that we owe our allegiance. Somehow, many in office forget this basic tenet of government. I find it ironic that many in “churches” also forget at whose pleasure they live and breathe...God Almighty. It is ultimately to God that we owe everything including our obedience and praise. It is the great leader who understands “for whom they ‘work’” and to whom they are ultimately responsible. Otherwise, why be sworn in on a Bible? Being “sworn in” using a personal checkbook might be more appropriate for many of our elected officials.

Psalm 63:1-8 Page 670, BCP

Deus, Deus meus= “O God, you are my God”

1

*O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; *
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,
as in a barren and dry 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.*

3

*For your loving-kindness 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.*

5

*My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, *
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,*

6

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

7

*For you have been my helper, **

3

and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

8

My soul clings to you; *
your right hand holds me fast.

When people die we often inscribe their tombstones with “Rest in peace”. Is it possible to “rest in peace” while still alive? The psalmist would have us believe that it is possible even for those who are alive IF that rest is in the peace of being “under the shadow of your wings”. Perhaps the reason we don’t have “peace and rest” in this life is that we refuse to place our trust in God? Who among us could not benefit from having this kind of relationship with our Creator? As we teach our children, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. IF I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Is that how you and I feel about the peace we find in trusting in God? We would not lie to our children, would we?

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 all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the 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 up 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.

“Monkey see, monkey do” except in following the example of Paul? This was the source of conflict in last week’s reading, was it not? For the second week, Paul has some choice words of warning about sin and its continuation among the “saved” of Corinth. Staying “out of trouble” has always been a problem for Christians who are “in the world” but must stay “out of the world”. More and more I am convinced that the “purpose” of Christians in this cruel world is to “protect the good” and “defend the defenseless”. Is this not the command of Christ: “This is the WHOLE DUTY of man, to love the Lord with all your heart

and treat your neighbor as yourself”? Paul admonishes the Corinthians to withstand temptation and to rely on God for salvation and support in their daily lives to protect the “good” and those who need “protection”. This should serve the purpose of getting us “back to basics”. If any of us are wondering “What is my duty, my purpose, my goal in life?” this should make it very plain. That’s why Jesus said “Take up my CROSS and follow me.” Notice that he did not say “Take up my easy chair and follow me.” IF we KNOW what to do, why don’t we DO IT? Perhaps it is because we don’t believe the last sentence: **“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.”** Is our “problem” that we don’t TRUST God? Paul learned that the only way to happiness and fulfillment was TOTAL DEDICATION to becoming a “willing slave” to “protect the good” and to “protect the defenseless”. We would do well to IMITATE that part of Paul’s life. Protect the “good” and defend the “defenseless” and we will be “faithful servants of the Lord most HIGH.”

Luke 13:1-9

There were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way 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 all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then 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. 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 none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He 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.'"

“There were some present” is similar to the popular “THEY SAY” or the French, “On”. What is being alluded to in this passage was probably right out of the “Jerusalem News” or the local “grapevine”. These incidents were obviously being talked about by the local people and the “meaning” was on their minds. They had questions about what these episodes meant in the context of Jesus’ presence. Does Jesus imply that the reason these Galileans were killed was their “sin”? A tower fell down and killed some eighteen people. Was their “accidental” death because they were sinners? To elucidate his “real meaning”, Jesus tells the “Parable of the fig tree”. What does this parable teach us? In the same way that we might put a mirror under the nostrils of a body to see if it is alive and would “fog a mirror”, similarly, our PRODUCING FRUIT is the “sign” of our being “spiritually alive.” No fruit, no life. But, the GRACE of God allows for us to show evidence of change by “producing fruit”. Notice though that there is a

“time limit” on the trial period. Does this imply that, eventually, even God will “give up on us”? Are we producing more “fruit” than we produced “a year ago”? Man, I sure have been “dug around” and “covered in manure” so I have no excuse for not producing “fruits”. Is Jesus intimating that the Galileans who died at the hands of Pilate or, those who died because the tower fell, did NOT produce “fruit” and that was the reason for their deaths? As in the parable, are we being “dug up” because we have not produced “fruit”? In our spiritual life, IF we are not growing, we are dying or dead and are apt to be “dug up” to leave room for those who might produce fruit. In Christ, there is no “standing still”. (In my life, I find that I take two steps forward and then, one step, or more, backwards. Is this your experience?) Moses could have stayed a shepherd and lived a long life of boredom tending sheep. David could have remained a shepherd tending his father’s sheep. Paul could have remained a tent-maker and lived to old age. Jesus could have stayed a carpenter, married and raised a family. BUT, God had a purpose for their lives that required their MOVING and GROWING and SERVING in God’s plan to save His people. Has God “called” you to a “higher purpose”? Are we “spiritually bored” and just killing time waiting to die OR do we know our “calling” and are we MOVING and GROWING and SERVING? In Christ, there are no distinctions for race, sex or nationality. The distinctions are “fruitful” or “fruitless”. The question we must ask ourselves is: “Am I producing fruit worthy of my Lord?” It is a JOY to be among “fruitful” people who encourage each other to use their gifts to “produce fruit”: LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS... Easter is almost here. Spring is almost here. Pray for a spiritual spring when the fruits of the Spirit will be as obvious as the newly-sprouted green leaves that clothe our landscapes.