



## Journey Through Lent 2010

### Third Sunday of Lent (Year C)

March 7, 2010

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between paragraphs. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

#### Opening Ritual & Prayer

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

**Leader:** Christ be our light.

**All: Shine in the darkness.**

**Leader:** Christ be our light.

**All: Shine in the world**

**Leader:** Christ be our light.

**All: Shine in our lives each day.**

Read aloud to yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture. Readings for the Third Sunday of Lent (Year C) : Exod 3:1-8a,13-15; 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9.

#### Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The theme of repentance runs through the Gospel readings of year C from the third to the fifth Sundays of Lent. Repentance is not only an important Lenten theme, but it is an important theme in Luke's Gospel as well. The root meaning of the Greek noun for repentance (*metanoia*) means to make an about face and return, in this case, to God. Repentance, or a turning away from one path to another, is not so much finding God as it is being found by God. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of a God who is patient and ready to give people another chance.

The parable of the fig tree takes us back to an earlier more agrarian era, but modern readers should not miss its spiritual payload. A parable is a story with meaning thrown along side. One way of interpreting the meaning thrown alongside the parable of the fig tree is to interpret it allegorically. In such an interpretation, the fig tree and the vineyard represent Israel, the owner is God, the gardener (vinedresser) is Jesus, and the three years refer to the period of Jesus' ministry. But this is not the only possible interpretation of the parable.

The parable can also be explored by looking at some of the odd things in it and the questions it evokes. What is a fig tree doing in a vineyard? Was it there before the vines were planted and just allowed to stay? A fig tree takes about seven years to bear fruit, so it is not surprising that there is no fruit after just three years. Has the three years of Jesus' ministry been fruitless? What kind of fruit is he expecting? The judgment is to cut the tree down if there is no fruit, no life, no future.

In Jesus' parable, the gardener pleads on behalf of the fig tree and it is granted one more year to bear fruit. The year that Jesus proclaimed earlier in Luke's Gospel, "the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19), would be a year of forgiveness, restoration, and second chances. The reader/hearer of the parable wonders whether Jesus or the community of his disciples will always seek to save one lone fig tree ( a metaphor for a would-be disciple of Jesus) that isn't producing, that hasn't heard or taken the message to heart, repented and changed?

The parable causes one to wonder what would we do if we have only a year left to live, only a short time in which to make up for the wrongs and the opportunities missed? How profoundly important would that year would be? For we would have to do some serious fertilizing and hoeing so as to bear fruit in that year. Will any of us bear fruit this year? Will we take to heart the lesson of the fig tree to live each day as a gift from God? In God's time, a fruitless past need not produce a barren future. For it is by their fruits that the followers of Jesus are known (see Matthew 7:20).

There is a profound paradox in the parable of the fig tree. If we wish to bear fruit we must die to ourselves. The choice before us every Lent is about dying: fruitful dying to self for the sake of others. The challenge is to live each day in such a way that we will have no fear before God as to how we have died to self so that others might live. This is how Jesus bore fruit and how we will as well.

## Questions for Reflection

- ✚ What behaviors do you need to leave behind this Lent so as to bear fruit in your life?
- ✚ Who are the people in your life who have died to themselves so that others might live?
- ✚ If you had only a year to live, how would you live it?

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be fruitful in our love for you.

**All: By loving one another as you loved us.**

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be fruitful in the care of our bodies.

**All: By eating healthy foods and by regularly exercising.**

**Leader:** Lord, help us to be fruitful in developing our faith and in practicing it.

**All: By observing our Lenten practices of fasting, praying and almsgiving.**

**All: Amen**

**Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.**