Third Sunday in Lent

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This story of Moses is a favorite. Moses is fascinated by the bush that is on the side of the mountain, burning fiercely but isn't consumed by the fire. He takes the time to go closer, to see what this is. There may have been others that saw this, but did not turn aside, too concerned with their own lives, or just too busy. As he approaches, God admonishes him to take off his shoes, he is standing on holy ground. And then he tells this man that he will go to Pharaoh and tell him to release the Israelites from bondage.

Moses speaks modestly, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Of all those who are off spring of Israel, Moses is probably the only one that can go to Pharaoh. He was raised in the court as a son. And God promises to be with him on this mission. We know the rest of the story. But it is this moment that Moses is given his mission, and accepts his position as a leader of his people. Well trained in the royal house of Egypt.

Paul reminds us of those who followed Moses and their actions. All of them were blessed with spiritual food and drink provided by God in the wilderness. Not all

remained obedient to God and were struck down in the wilderness. In fact, there wasn't anyone who left Egypt that were allowed to enter the Promised Land, except Aaron. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness until all of the generation that left Egypt had died, of the risks and misfortunes of the wilderness, or of the plagues of snakes, and disease, or just old age.

God offered redemption for those who turned from their evil ways and embraced God's laws. And for those who are described in the psalm, those who cling to God, listen and try to live by every word. Those who embrace and love God, and do all they can to follow and be obedient.

The gospel tells us of things that are so horrific, we have a tendency to try to overlook them in our reading. There were Galileans who were massacred by Pontius Pilates soldiers while they were performing sacrifices to God. Their blood was mixed with the blood of the animals that were being sacrificed. Were these people murdered because they were more sinful than those around them?

The tower of Siloam, located near the pool of Siloam, the site of the miracle performed by Christ where he healed a man blind from birth. You may remember

that Jesus made mud from his own spit and dirt to cover the man's eyes, then told

him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He was healed from an impossible condition.

People who knew the man, asked Christ who had sinned, the man or his parents.

This is now the site of a terrible tragedy, where a tower collapses and kills 18

people. Are these people killed for their sins? Targeted because they are

particularly bad?

In our own time, there are those who claim people who suffer are somehow

guilty of something that causes God to punish them for their sins. One that is

particularly abhorrent to me is when some claim the AIDES epidemic is

punishment for being homosexual. Or that a natural disaster: tornado, flood,

earthquake, that strikes a city, is somehow retribution for some imagined sin of

the people. The New Orleans disaster from hurricane Katrina was spoken of as

payment for the sins of a wicked city.

That is not how I read this scripture. Jesus is using the example of the innocents

murdered by the Romans, and those who died under the collapsed tower as no

more sinful that those he is addressing. He tells them that they must repent. They

will not escape their own disaster. We often say that no one leaves this world alive. If we would be with God, we must repent and live as God's beloved people.

In the parable of the fig tree, the gardener asks for another chance for the tree that has not borne fruit. He offers to give special care to the tree, to give it a chance for redemption. Jesus takes the position of the gardener for us – so we can have more time, and more chances for our own redemption.

Jesus really lets us know that we must repent and bear fruit, or we will be culled like the fig tree. How do we reconcile that with the love and forgiveness that we know come from Jesus? The admonition to repent, to turn around and do God's will is the message here. Perhaps Jesus knows that He must first get our attention. Perhaps he is speaking in metaphors, that without repentance, we cannot have redemption. We cannot take our places in heaven.

How does that reach into the 21st century?

Our modern plagues, AIDES, war, Ebola, plane crashes, cancer, even epidemics of diabetes and obesity, are not visited upon us because of our sinfulness. They are part of living in the world. My first husband died from the ravages of AIDES. Like many who suffered from leukemia and other diseases of the blood, and those

who needed blood transfusions, he was treated with blood that was unscreened and untested. The blood that gave him remission from leukemia, infected him with HIV. Was he more sinful that others? Were the children that were given transfusions for leukemia, or Hemophilia, so sinful that they should die from AIDES?

We are not called to judge others, particularly those who suffer innocently. It is not our job to assign blame, or associate sin with catastrophe. We are called to repent. To live closer to God. And we are to answer Jesus' call to minister to those who suffer.

In Lent we are especially encouraged to take on a discipline. Sometimes we give up a treat, or fast. Or we can decide to serve others. There are needs in our community. The food bank needs new volunteers a few days a week, check with Cheryl Mulder about details. We are sprucing up the Trinity room and some of the side rooms and there will be a work day to prepare our grounds for spring the Saturday before Palm Sunday, check with Lori Hudson regarding those details. The Vestry is recruiting people to help on committees to run various facets of our spiritual life here at Trinity. I invite you to consider taking on one of these disciplines. The opportunity to serve gives so much more back than it costs.