
Tell Us What You Think

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith
The Third Sunday in Lent – Year C**

'Tell me what you think.' Today's scriptures and prayers are about what you think. Both in our gospel reading that we just heard, and in our epistle assigned for today, it's about what you think.

But we need to know what you think not only about what Jesus asks his audience concerning "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." You recall that he asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" (Lk. 13:2) And we need to know not only what you think about "those eighteen persons who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them." Again, you recall that Jesus asked his audience, "Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" (Lk. 13.4)

Rather, tell us what you think concerning what the apostle Paul also referred to in the epistle which we did not read but which is also assigned for today; because in that reading Paul is also concerned with what you think. In that reading he refers to the story which follows today's first reading from Exodus: how the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until a new generation could arise to become the people of God. He says ominously, "God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness." (1 Cor. 10:5).

But then Paul says something that will be quite interesting for us to consider here today. "Now these things," the apostle wrote in today's epistle reading from 1 Corinthians 10.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did . . .

And he goes on to say:

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. (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11-12)

"So if you think you are standing," Paul says. Yes, that's his way of also asking, 'what do you think?' More sharply, Paul is asking Lenten questions in these scriptures appointed for today. But let me sharpen these questions for the sake of our Lenten journey in this year of 2022. Yes, I hear both the gospel and the epistle say that there are similar events occurring in the world today that are also examples for us, 'so that we might not desire evil' as others are doing, and examples that can also "instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

Now let me tell you how I think that today's scriptures can provide examples for us here today, in our season of Lent, in our wilderness sojourn through a pandemic crisis, and so on and so forth. But I'd be interested to hear what alternatives occur to you. First, here's my effort to think about some examples.

'Do you think that because today's Russian dictator is acting the way that he is, that he is a worse human being than all others?

No, I tell you; but unless we repent we will find ourselves acting out similar attitudes and behaviors as he is doing.

Or those who are enabling this pandemic to spread, or enabling this climate crisis to imperil the planet and poison the future for many habitats and our descendants—do you think that they are worse offenders than all the others living in the world?

No, I tell you; but unless we repent we will be as accountable and complicit as they are.' (My adaptation of Luke 13:2-5)

Yes, I hear both the gospel and the epistle say that there are similar events occurring in the world today that are also examples for us, 'so that we might not desire evil' as others have done and are doing, and examples that can also "instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11)—whether we're ready or not.

But fortunately today's scriptures are not limited to these Lenten themes of sin and repentance: of confessing and acknowledging our own faults, changing our attitudes, and amending our behaviors. Thank God we also have our first reading appointed for this third week of Lent in the year 2022. Yes, we also get this Exodus story:

The angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] 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." (Exodus 3:2-4)

"Here I am," said Moses to God, "Here I am." And that is exactly what we are privileged and called to do for our Lenten journey in this third week of our observance. Like Moses we have the honor and the challenge to turn aside and see how it is that we can approach our holy God in this age and discover what is not being consumed but instead what persists as holy and life-giving for our time.

And what is it that Moses discovered that was holy and life-giving for his time? This is what he heard out of that holy fire that was not consumed or consuming:

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people . . . I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them . . . and to bring them up out of that land . . . (Exodus 3:7-8)

Now isn't that what we're really after in this season of Lent, whether we're fasting with confession and repentance, or whether we're simply hungering and thirsting for rescue and righteousness in this season of dictators and pandemics and climate crisis? In either or all of these ways, like Moses we can turn aside in this season from customary things in order to see a marvel: the marvel of how the things of God are calling to us, and the marvel of how the things of this world are not being consumed but rather renewed.

Isn't that the gospel 'good news' that we are also here for during this season of Lent, in order that we may come to the great festival of Easter as a resurrection people bearing witness to the triumph of eternal life over death and destruction?

And so now let us also say, 'Hear am I.' While around us we have examples of the rise and fall of dictators, examples of plagues and pandemics, examples of the planet's agony as we struggle with our stewardship of the earth—in all these examples around us let us also expect to hear the Spirit of God calling out to us, as God called out to Moses from the burning bush and said:

'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' (Exodus 3:5)

Yes, let the remaining days of this Lenten season be holy ground for us as we renew our faith, hope and love for the coming season of Resurrection life. Do you think we can keep a holy Lent like that?