



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 3 (C)
March 24, 2019

[RCL] Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Exodus 3:1-15

Surely, surely, we are standing on holy ground. An ancient, well-worn story greets us this week: a bush alight that is never consumed and an eternally mysterious, divine self-disclosure. The Lord reveals a few things in this passage. One, God speaks the name of Moses and reveals a concern for God's people – and even more, the Lord knows them by name. The Lord also reveals that he will be with the Israelites as Moses brings them out of Egypt. A concern with no subsequent action is well-intentioned but ultimately futile. The Lord's concern is matched with the assurance of the Israelites' deliverance.

Lastly, the Lord reveals who the Lord is. Granted, the name can't really be translated; it has vexed linguists and scholars for centuries. It's a name that isn't even pronounced in the Jewish tradition, so holy are its letters. But nevertheless, it is revealed – a name to hold onto. We meet a God who not only knows our names but gives us his own name to utter, even if only under our breath.

- What holy ground have you stood upon recently? How did you “remove your sandals” in response to it?
- God's self-disclosure is one of vulnerability. Where else in scripture do you see this theme?

Psalm 63:1-8

When I first moved to Tennessee in 2016, a severe drought troubled the area. It lasted for almost six months: each day was eggshell blue, 75 degrees, and eventually, maddening for all creatures. The land cracked, the dirt became dust, licking the cars and windows; the usually verdant hills became clay orange. Everything wilted. Leaves became frail and brittle, dropping from their branches like pebbles.

When the rains came, it was as if all living creatures were inflated, ballooned into being.

Our psalmist speaks of a “soul” – or a “life/being” (perhaps a better Hebrew translation) – which thirsts for God and faints for God. Just like a barren and dry land where there is no water, this psalmist's life aches and yearns for release from their dried, cracked, uninhabitable dwelling. The longing for water, for the life-giving force, is only filled and satiated by the presence of God. Such encounters leave one meditating on the sweetness of that presence in all places and for all times.

Like in the Exodus account, God meets us in these liminal spaces – on a mountain, in a drought – and not only satiates our longings but draws us into an existence where our mouths open with praise, releasing joyous songs.

- What longings has God given you and your community?
- What experience lately has inspired your lips to ring out with praise?

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

“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.” Paul’s interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, at least in this passage, is quite harsh. The mantra repeats itself over and over again: “*These people...did this...*” but “*we must not.*” Paul’s standard rhetorical flair meets his troubling prejudices, all with the hope of compelling the church (or churches) at Corinth to resist temptation. *Even those who were baptized into Moses* were once standing, but they too fell. He urges and compels them to remain strong amidst the temptations of a culture where sexual immorality and idolatry seem to rage on (though Paul’s perception of such behavior is likely heightened due to his gentile prejudices). That this testing is common to everyone seems to be little consolation in such a dire passage.

But with the final verse in this pericope, Paul moves to what may be the only good news we have: God is faithful. He is urging the Corinthians to draw from the source of their power, to trust the faithfulness of God and the truth that God won’t allow a test that is unbearable.

- How do you respond to Paul’s depiction of the Israelites in the wilderness?
- What has testing looked like for your faith community?

Luke 13:1-9

Can you hear a group of people trying to get a rise out of Jesus? “We heard about some Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices! Can you believe that?!” But Jesus is not really impressed by their tale. Were they worse sinners? No, he says. All must repent or perish. A harsh tune, but one that is in sync with Paul’s song above.

And how will we know if we’ve repented? The parable instructs us that the tree will bear fruit. Weirdly, we’re given another year, perhaps a grace period, to see whether or not fruit will flower forth.

The gardener, likely a skilled gardener, has the prudence to understand that fruit does not grow immediately. Growing figs takes time, bearing fruit requires patience – and appropriate nourishment. While it may be tempting to chop down the parts of ourselves that seem like they are taking forever to heal or grow up, maybe we need to ask what nourishment we need, instead. What compost is necessary to add to our roots? Time with friends? Scripture? A Sabbath rest? In addition to the repentance that is required of us, what else do our trees need? We may see the unhealthy nature of our soil, but how do we increase its wellbeing?

- From what must you turn and repent? What about your church community?
- What does healthy soil mean to you? What do you need in your life to enrich it?

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