

Weekly Reading – Monday, March 1, 2010

Okay, we turn now to the texts for Lent III 2010, March 7, 2010. Isn't it convenient to have all these Sundays falling on the 7th, 14th, etc.? Easy to remember. If last week's common theme was "Stand Firm," this week's might be "If You Think You Are Standing Firm--Watch Out!"

Isaiah 55: 1 - 9

Well, this is a rich text, in several of its parts and in whole. Overall, it is a call to seek or return to God addressed to the people returning from exile. Verses 2 and 3 ring especially true in the midst of the current recession. "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread . . . Incline your ear, and come to me." The current film, *Up In the Air*, might be considered in relation to the failures of money and possessions to satisfy or provide real security. In terms of the overall theme noted above, "Take Care," the closing verses are most germane: "Seek the Lord while he may be found . . . let the wicked forsake their way," and then, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." When we complacently or confidently imagine that our thoughts and ways are congruent with God's and we may be at ease, watch out!"

I Corinthians 10: 1 - 13

Paul begins by reminding the confident and "spiritual" Corinthians, that their forebears in the faith were also quite spiritual and had enjoyed a number of experiences of the Lord's presence, and yet they stumbled and fell. "God was not pleased with them." Paul discerns in the trials and tribulations of Israel in the wilderness a warning to those in Corinth who imagine that their rich and powerful spiritual experiences have placed them safely on higher or firmer ground. Nope, said Paul, no guarantees, no arrivals, "So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall." Just last week in yoga I was saying to myself, "Wow, I think you're getting this," as I arched back and up and pictured myself looking sort of like someone doing yoga, and whump, I lost my balance and thumped over onto my back and side. "Take care, when you think you're standing, lest you fall."

Luke 13: 1 - 9

The theme we've been developing, be alert to the temptations of arrogance, pride and self-satisfaction is a favorite theme of Luke's for he tends to see the people of Israel as having a sense of their specialness and entitlement. Still, this text is challenging, in part because it falls into two not clearly related parts. Part one finds Jesus on the way to Jerusalem in conversation with people who are trying to make sense of two recent incidents of life suddenly taken away. One is an incident of human evil, at the hands of Pilate, the other natural evil, an accident. The people want to know what this means, what explains the suffering of those who have/ are suffered? Why did it happen? Jesus doesn't answer their question but he does

challenge their answer. That answer is much like Pat Robertson's recent explanation of the earthquake in Haiti, namely, "Their own damn fault." Jesus denounces this and challenges his hearers to themselves repent, that is wake up and turn around. I take this to mean that Jesus believes it better to be shaken by such events and take a hard look at ourselves than it is to have ready, pat answers that save us from self-examination. The second part, the fig tree, stands for God's people who have one more chance to bear fruit. In other words, those who think they have nothing to worry about actually have just one more chance. Lent is a season for personal and ecclesial self-examination, a point amply scored by these texts.