

Sermon for 20 March 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8(UM788) ; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

### ***“Wandering”***

On this third Sunday of our symbolic personal retreat, we find ourselves confronted with towering mountains on every side. We want to be strong ... yet the examples of strength in our contemporary world are incredibly unattractive. Think Putin here. Think Trump. Think of all the state legislatures that are passing anti-abortion laws and voter suppression laws. It is as though the only way to control things is to be narrow, hateful, selfish, narcissistic. Yet at the very same time, we are more aware than ever of the difference between fair play and cheating, and season after season some fresh truth about injustice and selfishness gets opened up about our own past as a nation, our own ignorant dominance as whites or members of Western democracy.

I'm talking contemporary lingo ... but today's scriptures spell out the points I'm making with biblical precision. The prophet Isaiah rises up against Israel's selfishness, even as he insists that righteousness ... read equality, justice for the poor, and such like ... are of God and will be rewarded in the end. The psalmist thunders personal assurance for those who sincerely yearn and seek for God's way. The Apostle Paul cites Jewish history as he insists that there's absolutely no room for pride or any kind of moral towering over other nations or families or even individual leaders of other lands. "So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you than is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

Then comes Jesus, with the illustration nobody likes and none of us fails to feel. "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?"

"He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

What do we think God is doing with us these days? Aren't there possibilities of renewal in our current situation? Have we been left alone? What is this love we chatter about so bravely in church? Are there problems the Holy One can't master? Is anybody here without a mission of some kind? Who are we following, anyway?

This is wandering Sunday. Next week is UMCOR Sunday. We'll get back to the level playing field soon enough. Purpose will emerge, one way or another. Right now, pray for courage and diligence at the foot of all these mountains. Light a candle and move on. It looks like wandering ... but it's just part of the journey of love God is on with us.

Fix me, Jesus. Fix me. Amen.