

## **Giving a Fig**

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The Third Sunday in Lent  
St. Michael's Episcopal Church  
Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

- Figs have a mixed reputation, don't they?
  - Most of us today only know them in one form: Fig Newtons
  - Why 'fig' newtons, anyway?
- Apart from that, if we hear something about figs, it's probably from the Bible
  - Because figs were a staple of the Ancient Near Eastern diet
  - And of the modern Near Eastern diet as well
  - So it's part of the cultural landscape
  - Just like when we want to tell a story about George Washington (even if it isn't true) we say that as a boy he cut down an apple tree
  - And on the other side of the equation we say that Johnny Appleseed planted more apple trees
  - Does this have anything to do with apples? No, it's just a narrative device
  - And figs are a narrative device for Jesus
- So he uses fig trees he encounters as a metaphor to make a point
  - Whether it's cursing a fig tree because it produces no fruit (Mark 11)
  - Or telling a story about a man planting a fig tree in his vineyard, in our Gospel reading today
  - It's a pretty straightforward metaphor. The tree is a person, or maybe a group of people, like Israel or the Church

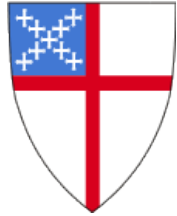
- And the figs are that person’s “fruit” – what they have to show for their life.
- One mistake I think people make with this are assuming that the demanding vineyard owner is God the Father, and the patient gardener is God the Son.
- Instead, I think the demanding vineyard owner is other people. Or maybe our own self-talk. “I am not producing anything. I am worthless. I deserve to be cut down.”
- And God is the patient gardener, asking for another chance to cultivate us, nourish us, work with us to produce goodness with our lives. Another chance for us to bear fruit. To “give a fig”
- The “Patience of God”
  - That’s a phrase we might hear from time to time. But I don’t know if we really embrace it.
  - Sure, God is eternal. God literally has all the time in the world.
  - But I think many of us were raised to see God as demanding, like the vineyard owner. And it’s hard to accept otherwise.
- Especially when we read passages like the one from 1 Corinthians. “God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.”
  - And that’s a problem if you stop there.
  - But if you keep going you read that “God is faithful, and will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but will provide the way out.”
  - God is faithful. God is patient.
- And one of the best examples of God’s patience is found in the Exodus passage.

- Those of you who were in the Episcopal 101 class last week will remember our discussion.
- About God stating the divine name to Moses: “I Am Who I Am”
- In Hebrew, it’s the four letters that sound like Y, H, W and H
- Some have pronounced it like breathing in and breathing out
- (Yah... Weh...)
- Consider the moment when our Creator God, who created us by breathing the divine breath into us, now shares the divine name with the sound of that very breath. Yah... Weh...
  - That is “who I am.”
  - I am the breath that gives you life.
  - I am the breath that makes you who you are.
  - I Am.
- But notice God didn’t just show up in front of Moses declaring. “I Am Who I Am!”
  - No... first he let Moses be a shepherd in the middle of nowhere for 40 years
  - Then, he set a nearby bush on fire, so Moses would take notice
  - Then, Moses came over and God said “I am the God of your father, etc. And I want you to Pharaoh and set your people free”
  - Then Moses said “but who am I?”
  - Then God said, it doesn’t matter. The point is that I am with you.
  - Then Moses said ok, then who are you? (Actually, he says, what if they Israelites ask who you are, what will I tell them. It’s like saying “Well I know who you are, but I’m asking for a friend”)
  - And THAT is when God finally says “I Am Who I Am.”
- And God’s patience does not end there. Not by a long shot.

- It stretches well into chapter 4
- Moses says “what if they don’t listen?”
- So God does a miracle with his staff, and then infecting his hand with leprosy and healing it again
- The Moses says, “But I’m not a good speaker!”
- And God says “Is this still going? We’re well into chapter 4 already!”
- No, he says I will help you speak
- And Moses says “Make someone else do it!”
- And God actually does get a little annoyed here. Still, God accommodates Moses by getting his brother to do the talking.
- If it sounds exhausting, because it is.
  - Because people can be exhausting. We can all be exhausting.
  - We don’t deserve God’s patience.
  - But we have it. Because God is faithful.
  - The least we can do is have patience with each other.
- Once I was accused of over-complicating things (can you imagine?)
  - And it was said “You’re supposed to be such a communicator, why does understanding take so many tries?”
  - And my answer was this: Being a good communicator means recognizing that good communication requires patience.
  - And most of us give up way too fast.
- When you plant a fig tree, be prepared to wait a few years for it to give a fig.
  - When something is important, get comfortable. Be prepared for understanding to take awhile.
  - Because that’s the kind of patience God has with us. Amen.

# The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Third Sunday in Lent

Year C  
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Exodus 3:1-15  
1 Corinthians 10:1-13  
Luke 13:1-9  
Psalm 63:1-8

## The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him 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." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God

of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations."

## **The Psalm**

### **Psalm 63:1-8**

#### *Deus, Deus meus*

1 O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; \*  
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,  
as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.

- 2 Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, \*  
that I might behold your power and your glory.
- 3 For your loving-kindness is better than life itself; \*  
my lips shall give you praise.
- 4 So will I bless you as long as I live \*  
and lift up my hands in your Name.
- 5 My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, \*  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,
- 6 When I remember you upon my bed, \*  
and meditate on you in the night watches.
- 7 For you have been my helper, \*  
and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.
- 8 My soul clings to you; \*  
your right hand holds me fast.

## **The Epistle**

### **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 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. No testing has overtaken you that 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.

## **The Gospel**

### **Luke 13:1-9**

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, '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.'"

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*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

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