

LENT: IN FAITH WE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Third Sunday in Lent
March 11, 2007

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Be careful not to fall ...

This week's epistle includes a warning from the apostle Paul about becoming overconfident: "Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12, *CEV*). And this week's Gospel text challenges the notion of false confidence. The text is structured in two parts. The first part (verses 1-5) focuses on repentance and includes two questions posed by Jesus (verses 2, 4); the second part (verses 6-9) calls our attention to God's merciful patience.

In the account of the Galileans who perished and those who were killed when a tower collapsed, Jesus teaches that tragedy is not to be interpreted as evidence of sinfulness. Likewise, Jesus cautions those who do not suffer tragedy not to be self-righteous and assume they are without sin. In Jesus' day, physical suffering was viewed as a consequence of sin (see Luke 5:18-24; John 9:2, 3). Jesus refutes this notion and dismantles the interpretation that suffering is to be equated with sinfulness. To those with a self-righteous attitude, Jesus exhorts them to repent. His message harkens back to the preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:3) who warned the people to turn back to God so that their sins would be forgiven.

The parable of the fig tree helps us understand divine patience and provides a context for suffering and sin. It normally takes a fig tree three years in which to mature and bear fruit. In this parable, the three years have passed, and the tree has been unproductive. The tree is spared, even though it is fruitless, because of the patience of the gardener. The parable serves as a metaphor to teach us about the ways of God in relation to sinful humanity. God gives us a second chance over and over again, even when we are undeserving of such boundless grace.

The LORD can always be trusted to show mercy each morning (Lamentations 3:23, *CEV*). In this week's Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah reminds us to "return to the LORD our God. He will be merciful and forgive [our] sins" (55:7b, *CEV*). Our God is indeed kind and merciful, and God's love for us can always be trusted (Psalm 86:15), even when we fall.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Guatemala – With thanks to God for the national campaign, *Do Not Be Afraid, Guatemala*, by which people are strengthened to cope with natural disasters and violence, and with thanks to God for the dedication of the Q’eqchi Bible with Deuterocanon, and with prayers for the completion of the San Mateo Chuj, Pokomchi, and Ostuncalco Mam translation projects; **Honduras** - With thanks to God for the evangelistic opportunities that the Bible Center affords, and with prayers for the Petra project through which Bibles are placed in primary schools, and for the staff needed for new phases of ministry; **El Salvador** – With thanks for the protection God has shown towards Bible work, and with prayers that God grant new opportunities to serve the churches, and with prayers for the Bible Panorama exhibition, an interactive space where youngsters can get to know the Bible message in a meaningful way and can improve their relationship with God.

Activity Corner: “Forgiveness” Invitations

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (assorted colors); pens or pencils; scissors.

Read together Isaiah 55:1-9. Discuss the Lord’s invitation as it is described in verses 1 and 2. What kind of banquet is described? How is experiencing God’s love and forgiveness (see verses 6 and 7) like being filled at a banquet? Distribute sheets of construction paper to members of your household. Fold the paper in half so that it measures 8-1/2” x 5-1/2”. Then trace a heart so that the left side of the heart is against the fold. After cutting out the heart, write on the front, “Lord God, I invite you into my heart.” On the inside, encourage everyone to write a prayer, asking for God’s forgiveness.