

Reflections for the
Third Week of Lent



March 11, 2007

To

March 17, 2007

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seen Abraham!"

58"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

59At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

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The conversation between Jesus and the crowd continues. It's beginning to turn nasty. The crowd calls him a Samaritan and demon possessed. Not the best way to win friends and influence people. Jesus, meanwhile continues to offer them the truth. It's amazing the lengths that we will go to in our attempts at denying the truth. The more he preaches the more the crowd gets fired up. Finally, he utters the words, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" The crowd could restrain their anger no longer. They picked up stones and intended to stone him for his blasphemous statement. Then it says in mysterious words, "...Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds."

I don't remember the last time (actually I don't think it has ever happened) that I so worked up a crowd that they were ready to stone me. I'll settle for 90% of the congregation simply staying awake during my sermon on Sunday mornings. There is something to be said for passion, even if it is wrongly directed. The crowd was full of passion. They felt their heritage was under attack and the Jesus was blasphemous in his remarks. They did what any good Jew would have done, they got ready to defend their faith and stone the blasphemer.

Where is our passion for God? When was the last time any of us got so upset with what someone was saying about God that we were ready to speak against them--let alone stone them! With our passion waning its not hard to see why the United Methodist Church seems to be in decline. Maybe we need to have someone stand up and remind us where we have come from and what Father Wesley would want us to be doing. I seem to remember him saying, "The World is My Parish!" Today, I'm not so sure that it is for most of us.

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Prayer: Lord, let me find something today to get fired up about!

Welcome to Daily Lenten Scripture Reflections. This is the print version of my online blog. I am making this copy available for those that do not have internet access. The Reflections will be created in six weekly booklets. Please be sure that you get a new booklet each week. Better yet, visit my blog:

<http://revtdg.wordpress.com>

On the blog you can read these same reflections and offer your comments upon them.

I also appreciate you comments in other forms. Give me a call or drop me a note and let me know if these reflections have helped focus your thoughts during this season of Lent.

Sunday March 11, 2007

Guilty as Charged

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 63:1-8

Isaiah 55:1-9

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Luke 13:1-9

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Repent or Perish

1Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

6Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

8" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

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Jesus has some rather harsh sounding words to those that come to him. In the first part of the reading he is talking about guilt. Those that came to him were suggesting that some persons were more guilty than others based on what happened to them. Jesus says that this is not so. All are equally guilty and all will perish unless they repent.

Saturday March 17, 2007

A Passion for God

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 87, 90

Jeremiah 13:1-11

Romans 6:12-23

John 8:47-59

John 8:47-59

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47He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

The Claims of Jesus About Himself

48The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

49"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. 50I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

52At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

57"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have

not to a physical bondage, but rather to a spiritual one. He further claims that it is sin that causes their enslavement. Again they argue the Father Abraham point and Jesus counters with a new line of reasoning. "You can't be Abraham's children if you are treating me this way. Instead you must be the children of the devil." The passage ends with Jesus' assertion that those that belong to God hears what God says and since they won't listen, then they must be the children of Satan--and, therefore, not belong to God.

I don't know about you, but most of the folks that I know don't take kindly to being called children of the devil. In the south, we'd say that "Those are fightin' words!" Every now and then, though, we need to be wakened from our reverie and get a little steamed under the collar and prove to the world that we are the children of the devil. It might do us good to have to prove that we are God's children. It might be good to act in loving ways--to help the neighbor; The feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to shelter the homeless. Maybe that is what the world is looking for--more people that will act as if they really believe what they say they believe.

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Prayer: Lord, raise my hackles today and make me a true believer in all that I say or do.

In the second paragraph he talks about a fig tree planted in a vineyard. The owner has been watching this particular fig tree for three years. He has never found it to bear any fruit. He tells the caretaker to cut it down. The caretaker, though, asks for mercy and says, "Give it one more try. Then if there is no fruit. I will cut it down."

When it comes to sin. Is one sin worse than another sin? Do we sometimes think that a murderer is a much bigger sinner than someone that tells a small lie? I have heard this question debated over the years. I have also heard people say that someone in an accident or undergoing a personal tragedy must have done something to make God angry. In a similar vein, they might say the person must have some hidden sin.

I'd like to suggest that there is no point scale for sin. No sin is any greater than any other sin. ALL sin is bad. ALL sin keeps us from a proper relationship with God. All of us are guilty and in need of the blood of Christ to cleanse us of our sin.

As I've thought about this parable, I believe that the caretaker must be Christ. He pleads with the Father (the vineyard owner) to let the fig tree (me) have one more chance before judgment. I am glad that Jesus does truly intercede for us, because we ALL need our sins to be cleansed and the forgiveness that he provides to us.

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Prayer: Thank you Lord, for your patience with me and thanks for cleansing me of my sin.

Monday March 12, 2007

A Clear Word for a Confused Mind

Daily Lectionary Readings

Psalm 80

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Romans 4:1-12

John 7:14-36

John 7:14-36

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Jesus Teaches at the Feast

14Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. 15The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

16Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. 17If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. 19Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

20"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?"

21Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. 22Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. 23Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? 24Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.[b]"

39"Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would[c] do the things Abraham did. 40As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41You are doing the things your own father does."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

The Children of the Devil

42Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

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When I read these words my mind's voice tends to get a little agitated. I can't imagine either the crowd or Jesus simply sitting back and calmly saying these words back and forth to one another. I married into an Italian family. I know that when the conversation gets tense there is going to be waving of hands and raised voices with each side trying to convince the other of their point. I sort of imagine Jesus and the crowd in that same manner. Waving their arms and with much animation and noise talking back and forth over this issue. The crowd pulls out the Abraham card. They are claiming their "heritage" as free people that have never been slaves to anyone! Jesus, though, equates their slavery

After many months of prayer and struggle, he recognized the truth of the situation. He moved to another church and he and his family flourished in the new situation. His eyes were opened and he was able to see more clearly how God was calling him into ministry for the Kingdom. That is what Jesus was trying to do. To open the eyes of those that were coming to him. Some heard and understood and their eyes were opened. They followed and believed. Others, could not understand. They did not follow or believe.

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Prayer: Lord, help us to seek out the truth. When we find it open our eyes so that we can see it and respond as you would have us to respond.

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Friday March 16, 2007

Those are Fightin' Words

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 16

Jeremiah 11:1-18, 14-20

Romans 6:1-11

John 8:33-47

John 8:33-47

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33They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants[a] and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

34Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

35Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38I am telling you what I have

Is Jesus the Christ?

25At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? 26Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ[a]? 27But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

28Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, 29but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

30At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. 31Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?"

32The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

33Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. 34You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

35The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? 36What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

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As we read in Saturday's lection, Jesus had refused to go to Jerusalem for the Feast. He sent his disciples on and then he went secretly and listened to what the crowd was saying and watched what they were doing. In this reading, we see him move from anonymity into full blown public presence. Halfway through the Feast, he goes to the temple courts and begins to teach. The people are amazed at what he says. Yet as people begin to question his "learning", we see that there is once

again the veil that seems to be across their eyes, ears, and hearts. Jesus is trying to make clear the plan of God and yet the people cannot understand what he is saying. They hear words. They draw conclusions. They become upset. They threaten death. They threaten arrest. Yet Jesus keeps on teaching.

I sometimes wonder. "Just how dense am I?" I wonder what my eyes still cannot see. I wonder what my ears still cannot hear. I wonder what my mind still cannot comprehend. I want to understand Jesus. I want to know what God's plan for me is. Yet, I also realize that my old self fights within me. There are days when I want to put Jesus aside and do it my way. There are times when I've wished he wasn't there teaching me. It's hard to understand the ways of God. It's hard to know how to best serve God and accept Jesus.

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Prayer: Sometimes I am like to crowd in the Temple courts. Please clear my vision. Open my ears and make your word clear to my confused mind.

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Tuesday March 13, 2007

Hearing the Truth

Daily Lectionary Readings

Psalm 78:1-39

Jeremiah 7:21-34

Romans 4:13-25

John 7:37-52

John 7:37-52

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37On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

38Whoever believes in me, as[a] the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

27They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. 28So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." 30Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

The Children of Abraham

31To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

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As his destiny draws nearer, Jesus begins to talk about his departure (his death). He also links their sin with his death. If they refuse to believe who he is, then they will die in their sin once he has departed. He again makes reference to the connection between him and the Father. The Father's plan is his destiny and the words he speaks are the Father's words. I know it sounds confusing, but it says that , "even as he spoke, many put their faith in him." In concluding, he brings up the truth theme once again. In knowing him, he promises that we will know the truth. In knowing the truth, we will be set free.

The last few words in this passage have had a special meaning for me. Early in my ministry I served a church where there was a man in his 30's that had grown up in that church. I'll call him Dan. He held positions of authority within the congregation and community. Yet there were some in the church that always referred to him as "Little Danny" and never gave any heed to his suggestions. After watching this for some time and seeing the struggle that he was having at trying to do God's will in a place where most folks treated him as a little boy, the Lord laid this Scripture on my heart. I approached him and described the situation as I saw it and suggested that he might need to find a church that would value his talents, abilities and gifts. Then I quoted to him the words, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

authority of God's word as it is proclaimed and, yet, we still don't want to subjugate ourselves to that authority. Maybe we will sit back and say, "O, he's not a seminary graduate. Why should I listen to him?" or we'll say, "He's not of the right denomination, so he doesn't know what he is talking about." Yet, the truth may be staring us in the face and we just refuse to see it.

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Prayer: Lord, if your truth comes my way today, let me hear it and obey it, regardless of the source.

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Thursday March 15, 2007

The Truth Will Set You Free

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 42, 43

Jeremiah 10:11-24

Romans 5:12-21

John 8:21-32

John 8:21-32

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21Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

22This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

23But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,^[a] you will indeed die in your sins."

25"Who are you?" they asked.

"Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. 26"I have

40On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

41Others said, "He is the Christ."

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? 42Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family^[b] and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" 43Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. 44Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders

45Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

46"No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

47"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted.

48"Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them."

50Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"

52They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet^[c] does not come out of Galilee."

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Just as He had spoken to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus now speaks to the crowd about living water. Just as with the Samaritan woman, some of the people knew and understood what he was saying. Others did not. A divide was made with believers on one side and those that wanted to seize him on the other side. Then we segue to the Temple guards. These are the same ones that were sent out in yesterday's reading to arrest Jesus. They come back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, but there is not sign of Jesus. Their explanation, "No one ever spoke the way this man does." The response of the Pharisees,

"You mean he has deceived you also?"

The Pharisees seem to be building a head of steam against Jesus. He comes teaching the truth and sometimes the truth is very uncomfortable. Sometimes the truth sheds light on the dark dealing of our souls and we would rather not have folks see the inner workings of our lives. So, rather than change our lives, we try to impugn the truth. We try to say that the one speaking is: not educated, from the wrong side of the tracks, is out of his mind, etc. By putting down the one that is trying to reach out to us with the truth, we put ourselves in the better light and make our actions seem correct. This is what I feel was happening with the Pharisees. Some carpenter from Galilee was lecturing them!! How dare he!

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Prayer: Lord, help me to not be so pretentious that I miss the truth when it is brought to me by one of your servants.

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Wednesday Mach 14, 2007

Refusing to See the Truth

Daily Lectionary Reading

Psalm 119:97-120

Jeremiah 8:18-9:6

Romans 5:1-11

John 8:12-20

John 8:12-20

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The Validity of Jesus' Testimony

12When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

13The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

14Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. 15You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. 16But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. 17In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. 18I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

19Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." 20He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

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Jesus brings up the light of the world theme and talks about the darkness of the world and the light that his followers will possess. The Pharisees, obviously in the crowd and listening, challenge him. Like bullies on the playground they taunt him saying, "You're your own witness. You're, your own witness. Nah, Nah, nah, nah, nah. Your testimony is useless." In response, Jesus begins to try and explain the unique relationship that he has with God the Father, who also testifies with him. When they question him about where his father can be found, He makes it clear that they do not know the Father. If you knew who I was you would know the Father. Even though he was in the Temple courts and near the money, where there were sure to be guards, no one tried to seize him. It was not yet time for that.

Taunts are often the last resort of someone that knows he has lost the game. If I can't win by the highest score, then I'll put you down and call you names. I don't believe the Pharisees had come to the point of admitting defeat, but they were at the point of having to resort to taunts. Jesus just couldn't be stopped. His words rang with authority. The crowd was turning to his side and the leaders of the Jewish nation weren't sure what was happening.

Sometimes, I think that we are in the same boat. We hear the