

Sermon – 3rd Sunday in Lent

Burning Bushes and Fig Trees

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today is our 3rd Sunday in Lent - our journey continues. The Biblical lessons this morning conjure up images of bushes that talk and fig trees which produce little fruit if any.

Let's take a look at them and see what they mean for us. The first lesson is from the book of Exodus, the 2nd book of the Torah. We know this story very well, not necessarily from reading the Bible, but rather, from watching Charleston Heston in the Cecil B. De Mille classic 'The Ten Commandments'. The only problem with remembering the movie and not the Biblical text is that we forget what the lesson is about. Somehow we think the lesson is about Charleston, or Moses. I get them confused. Moses is standing on Holy Ground. Makes me think of one of my favorite singers, Barbara Streisand - Brooklyn gal, Erasmus High School, who recorded a great song - Holy Ground. You tube it - speaks volumes that God is around us. Let's get back to Moses. Moses is a nice guy even if he is inept and a refugee. Nice person even if he is a killer explosive type, an illiterate chosen for an enormous task. Kind of funny isn't it. God always chooses the unlikely people to do his work. Like us!

The lesson really has nothing to do with Moses, but rather what God said from the bush. Listen to the listing of verbs:

I have seen

I have heard

I have come down to rescue

I have indeed heard the cry of my people.

Wow. This again reminds me of a great movie. 'O God'. The movie stars George Burns as God. For those of you who are a little older will remember George from the Burns and Allen TV show which ran in the 1950s. It also stars John Denver as the assistant grocery store manager who has been chosen to be God's messenger. John Denver - some Lutheran roots. Married a gal, Annie, who attended a Lutheran college in Minnesota, Gustavus Adolphus College. Get the DVD and make it a family movie night. Great flick about God working in our lives. Many great quotes from the movie - the one I like very much is from George or God who

is testifying in a courtroom. "If you find it hard to believe in me, maybe it would help to know that I believe in you."

Back to the Verbs.

I have seen

I have heard

I have come down to rescue

I have indeed heard the cry of my people.

The point of this burning bush lesson is that God is involved with his people. Our God is not in some cosmic ethereal space between the rosette Nebula and Taurus. He is a part of us. Our God is a God of compassion, one who literally suffers with us. He does not stand aloof from human suffering but participates in it. Emmanuel - God With Us. Remember that from the burning bush - God With Us.

The God With Us statement took on even more significance with the advent of Jesus Christ. That really is the ultimate example of God being involved in the life of his people. That involvement with us is exactly what the Gospel is about.

At first glance it is about figs and fig trees. Simple, but maybe not so much. It's a parable about people. At the time of Jesus, a division was evident between the "perfect" ones and the not at all perfect, the common folk. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the cream of the crop. The masses, the common folk who continued to make mistakes, they should be excluded from the religious life. What value do they have? Or so the perfect ones said.

Reminds me of a Peanuts cartoon. Linus the Pharisees and Charlie is us. Lucy, Linus and Charlie Brown are lying on a hilltop looking at the sky on a summer afternoon.

Lucy: If you use your imagination you can see lots of things in the cloud formations... What do you think you see, Linus?

Linus: "Well, those clouds up there look to me like the map of British Honduras on the Caribbean...that cloud up there looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor... and that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen...I can see the Apostle Paul standing there to one side..."

Lucy... "very good... What do you see in the clouds Charlie Brown?

Charlie Brown: Well, I was going to say a ducky and a horsie but I changed my mind.

That's what the parable is about. Let's get rid of the fig trees that produce little fruit. Let's get rid of the people who continually bear little fruit- who make too many mistakes.

Jesus says in the parable - take it easy. Let me fertilize with my word and my spirit. Have patience and all will bear fruit. It's a parable for us.

We make mistakes -

He grieves with us, is patient with us, forgives us, and calls us to try harder. We will bear fruit.

We reject him -

He suffers with us, forgives us, is patient with us, calls us to try harder. We will bear fruit.

We hurt others - even those we love.

You got it - He forgives us, is patient with us, calls us to try harder. We will bear fruit.

Great lessons for us today. God is with us in a burning bush and everywhere.

And Jesus is with us as well. Digging around our foundation and spreading manure (his word) on us. LOVING us so much that we will bear fruit. I hope that your fruit will reach many people.

Amen- let it be so.

