

Lent 3, Year C 2022
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
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Exodus 3:1-15 Psalm 63:1-8 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Luke 13:1-9

Lent contains within it a tension between repentance and remembering that we are dust **and** that it is a season of preparation for Jesus' resurrection. In the early church Lent was part of a lengthy of preparation for baptism, of turning one's whole life to living in the way of Jesus. In some ways we stay in that "preparatory" path for a lifetime; Lent reminds us to turn, again and again, to Jesus. We are preparing for *joy*, and that to reach the joy of the risen Christ we go through the suffering of Christ. We walk into the darkness of minds, including ours, that say "crucify him!" when we know that Jesus has done nothing wrong. We walk into an acknowledgement of our own ways of denying Jesus, of distorting his love, and betraying him. "I do not know the man!" Our journey to joy includes self-examination, the hard work of naming the ways in which we have turned away from God "in thought, word, and deed." We remember, and we promise to turn back to Jesus. Hosanna, Lord – save us!

Our prayer book reminds us that Lent was also a time in which those with notorious sins, through repentance and forgiveness, were restored to the body of faith. Sometimes we stub our toes on repentance: my sins are not notorious, my sins are not as bad as ... you name it – the where, the who, the why So, before we repent, we judge. We ask ourselves, as in John's gospel (chapter 2): : "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Life shows us, in cruel terms, that sin does not cause suffering. Did those who died on September 11, 2001, sin any more or less than we have? In today's "history," the people of Ukraine have done nothing to warrant their deaths, the bombings of their cities, their reality of fleeing, literally for their lives. Our very human question is "why?" And it is a timeless question: why do the innocent suffer? This is what we ask Jesus? Yes. Over and over. We want to make sense of the world, and want our lives to make sense, to be within our understanding. The reality is that Jesus spends very little, if any, time answering this question (nor does God [in the Old Testament]). In fact, Jesus actively moves us away from the question of "why?" There is no logical answer. It is more helpful to ask a better question, to live deeply into the mystery that is God, and to actions within our capabilities.

Luke describes for us a scene in which Pontius Pilate has ordered the slaughter of a group of Galilean Jews, and their blood is literally mixed with the blood of "perfect" animals slaughtered for sacrifice. The people ask Jesus about it – and he These Galileans, Jesus says, are no worse sinners than any other Galileans. Think, Jesus says: when tower of Siloam collapsed, were those eighteen people worse sinners than you?

It would be much easier to think that bad things happen to bad people. Of course, that is not the way of life. Bad things happen to very good people.

Jesus instructs us, instead of asking the answers to our many "why?" questions, to embrace the mystery of God and our common humanity. Join with our neighbors in their suffering. Be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus in Christ Jesus. Start over, Jesus says. Turn around, which is to undertake Lenten self-examination and repentance. Ask the "who" question, instead of "why:"

Who is the landowner? Is it me – coming upon someone's peril and judging it? What if I entered into that space – talking to, praying for, listening to another's plight instead of standing apart from it? Why am I looking for loss instead of the potential for life?

Who is the fig tree – is it me? Am I unable or unwilling to bear the fruits of the Spirit? What do I need to do to grow deep roots of faith? Is that work within my branches or do I need to submit to the care, nurturing, and challenge of being cared for by a community? How might I thrive, now?

Am I the gardener? Maybe I see life and abundance where others see loss; maybe I do get my hands dirty for the work of Jesus. Can I pour hope into the soil when the outcome is uncertain?

It's a lot of questions, and I, too, prefer certainty, although mystery will get my attention. As long as it's safe. And I know the outcome. Jesus is right behind me saying, as God says to Moses: "I am with you." No matter what. Stop asking the question and go: Go sit with someone who suffers. Weep with those who weep. Fight for justice for someone else. Be that justice. Confront evil. Dig deep, and yield hope. I am with you.

Through Christ and in Christ, this is our story. When biblical leaders asked "why me?" God answered: "I am." Be not afraid.

I come back to the collect for today, which does not answer "why," but "how" and "who:" 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.

Show us the one who is with us, Jesus, our Lord, while we do the hard work of being, of entering into your mystery and love, learning to trust that through us, your kingdom will come.