

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Isaiah 55:1-9**

<sup>55:1</sup> Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. <sup>4</sup> See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup> See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. <sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**Commentary**

The prophet suggests that the people have been spending their resources on “that which does not satisfy”. They toil and fret, falling into frustration and despair. Their condition was aptly described by the English poet William Wordsworth, who wrote, “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.” This portion of Isaiah is addressed to the exiles in Babylon who believed that God had earlier forsaken them when Judah was defeated by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The prophet promised that God would act soon to liberate the exiles from captivity and return them to their place of origin. The second exodus will be more glorious than the first as they return to a land “flowing with milk and honey.” Salvation and material well-being will intertwine. Their privation during exile will be over, and they will once again enjoy beautiful prosperity, free for all. There is a price to be paid in one sense, however; the people are urged to “seek the Lord while he may be found” and return to God to find mercy and pardon, finding renewed trust in God. The development of this renewal takes work—just as our rededication to faithfulness and sacrifice does in the season of Lent. But the faith of the people in this

account will serve two purposes: witness to other nations about God's saving grace, and the nation of Judah after exile will draw foreigners who want to attach themselves to the restored nation under a mighty and merciful God.

## Reflection

1. What is Isaiah offering people?
2. What might he say in the isles of our grocery stores? At the mall? On Wall Street?

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

<sup>10:1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup> And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup> 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.

## Commentary

The Corinthians believed that the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion would magically protect them from punishment or sin. If they are so sure and so proud, Paul warned them, they should take heed of their Jewish ancestors, onto whose tree they have been grafted (Rom 11:17-22). The Hebrews, who had received a kind of baptism when they passed through the Reed Sea, and who had received a kind of communion when God provided them manna and water, nonetheless had committed grave sins and had to be punished. The Israelites had committed idolatry by sacrificing to the golden calf (Exodus 32:6) and later by worshiping Canaanite gods. Paul likely equated these with the idolatrous feasts attended by the Corinthians. Even if they felt secure, Paul said, they should beware: they have thus far escaped the persecutions endured by other believers. One day, such testing will reveal their true character and the depth of their commitment.

## Reflection

1. What tests have you endured in your life?
2. How did this affect your character and commitment?
3. Considering your life experiences, you believe that God tests you? If not, how do you make sense of the tough times in your life of faith?

## Luke 13:1-9

<sup>13:1</sup> At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?' <sup>8</sup> He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

## Commentary

This passage contains a commentary on current events and a parable of warning. Concluding a long discourse en route to Jerusalem, Jesus used the occasion to drive home his message: Repent before it is too late. Declining either to praise or condemn Galileans, Jesus instead turned on the crowd, asking if the men were killed because they were worse sinners than other Galileans. It was a rhetorical question. It was common wisdom that people who suffered were being punished for their own parent's sins, while the righteous were rewarded. "No, I tell you," Jesus said, strongly repudiating common belief. Jesus challenged the idea that God is the immediate cause of every event, thereby leaving room for human freedom. If people could no longer assume their good fortune was a result of their own righteousness, and if they, too, could die at any time, they were utterly vulnerable before God. Repentance is the only way, Jesus said. Conduct your affairs so that you are not afraid to stand before God when judgment comes. With quick speech and strong imagery, and pointed words, Jesus sought to overcome the deep resistance in his hearers to challenge and change.

## Reflection

1. If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, would you do anything differently today?
2. Is fear of judgment the primary incentive for living faithfully, or is it something else?
3. What motivates you?

## Responsive Psalter

## Psalm 63:1-8

- <sup>63:1</sup> O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
- <sup>2</sup> **So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.**
- <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.
- <sup>4</sup> **So I will bless you as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.**
- <sup>5</sup> My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
- <sup>6</sup> when I think of you on my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
- <sup>7</sup> **for you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.**
- <sup>8</sup> **My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me.**

## Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**