

Bible Challenge February 22 - 28, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The warnings are plentiful and blunt on the third Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season of repentance. Cut it out or get cut down! The warnings are accompanied by God's invitation to attentiveness: "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live." The landowner's ultimatum is forestalled by the gardener's readiness to till the ground one more year. That is good news for all of us. Thanks be to God!

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-9

To those who have experienced long years in exile, the return to their homeland is a celebration of abundant life. God calls them into an everlasting covenant of love. Those who return to the Lord will enjoy new life and forgiveness, because God's ways are not our ways.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 55.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Compare this invitation to repentance (Wake up!) with the invitation in Proverbs 9.

Option B. Chapter 55 concludes what scholars have called Second Isaiah or "the Book of Consolation," (chapters 40 – 55). Research the background and themes of this part of Isaiah.

Option C. Compare things that Isaiah 55 describes as choices or options with those that are sure or inevitable.

PSALM: Psalm 63:1-8

O God, eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you. (Ps. 63:1)

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 63.

Explorer Challenge: Compare Psalm 63 with Psalm 62.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Paul uses images from Hebrew story and prophecy to speak the truth of Jesus Christ: He is our rock, our water, our food, and our drink. Christ is the living sign of God's faithfulness.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 10 – 11:1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* In this passage, Paul alludes to some events in Israel's history. Use an annotated Bible to learn about any events that you do not recognize or remember.

Option B. In verse 9, Paul says "We must not put Christ to the test." Research what this phrase means, starting with Luke 4:12, Deuteronomy 6:16 and Exodus 17:1-7.

GOSPEL: Luke 13:1-9

Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 12:49 - 13- 21.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Fig trees are a frequent metaphor in the Bible. Expand your understanding by learning about fig trees: were they common, hard to grow, difficult to care for, etc.?

Option B. Read Deuteronomy 28 to learn why Jesus' audience might assume that physical suffering was the consequence of sin.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your word and obey it, and bring your saving love to fruition in our lives, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jesus began to proclaim, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. (*Matt. 4:17*)