



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 23 MARCH 2025 – Lent 3

COLLECT

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 63

- 1 O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; ♦
my soul is athirst for you.
- 2 My flesh also faints for you, ♦
as in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.
- 3 So would I gaze upon you in your holy place, ♦
that I might behold your power and your glory.
- 4 Your loving-kindness is better than life itself ♦
and so my lips shall praise you.
- 5 I will bless you as long as I live ♦
and lift up my hands in your name.
- 6 My soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness, ♦
and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips,
- 7 When I remember you upon my bed ♦
and meditate on you in the watches of the night.
- 8 For you have been my helper ♦
and under the shadow of your wings will I rejoice.
- 9 My soul clings to you; ♦
your right hand shall hold me fast.

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 1-13.

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, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. 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.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 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. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. 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.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and it is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Luke, chapter 13, verses 1-9.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel.

Gospel Acclamation

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

I am the light of the world, says the Lord,
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke, Chapter 13, verses 1-9

And, at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, O Christ

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

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. 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?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." '

(Luke 13.1-9)

A Reflection from Peter

This Gospel reading has something of an episode of Gardeners Question Time about it. Some of the best moments on that programme come when the experts disagree amongst themselves about the best course of action – whether it's for pruning roses or getting rid of slugs. Here the issue is a non-productive fig tree. Now fig trees can be tricky. We had three at Mirfield and one of them produced a seemingly unending harvest of wonderful figs twice and sometimes three times a year. The other two were erratic to say the least – sometimes refusing to produce anything for several years. This puts us on the side of the owner of the vineyard. He comes to check on the vines and on his specially planted fig tree and, in the last three years, it has not produced a single fig. OK, he says, cut it down. I've given it a decent chance. At this point the expert on the scene, the gardener, advises a bit more waiting: one more year, he says, with some good manure... If that still doesn't work, then you can cut it down.

What is this really about? Yes, it's about patience and being ready to wait a bit longer than you instinctively want to, but there's more. It is about opening ourselves up to the one who knows more and knows differently. Jesus is trying to help his listeners find a better way of looking at problems than our usual default positions. The reading begins with people recalling some Galileans who had become part of their own sacrifices because of some particularly cruel treatment by Pilate. Our usual mechanism is to think that somehow they must have deserved it; or that there just are some unbelievably cruel and awful people and there is no resisting them.

As we ponder further we see that this is all part of Jesus telling us that the old way - the 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' approach. – simply won't do Again and again he tells us, 'This may be what the world looks like, but not how it is....'" Instead of looking to lay blame, or to write someone off, learn from the Creator. God does not give up. In the collect for Ash Wednesday we pray, "Almighty God, you hate nothing that you have made..." Yes, life is challenging and really, really difficult sometimes – but in our first reading today St Paul has a word of encouragement. It is a surprising moment in St Paul, but very reassuring for all that. "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.' Like the fig tree we are given the chance to try again, to be nourished by the manure of life and to bring forth fruit!