

The Passionate "I Am" 3 Lent C

Thus far on this journey of ours during Lent we have considered how scripture beckons us to grapple with these forty days of Christ's passion. My theme during Lent has been to look at Christ's passionate life. And in these forty days we have a snapshot of this passionate human being whose earthly journey will end with Holy Week – the week of Jesus greatest test and passion.

Our Lord has a passion for life that he desires to live and give to his disciples. Passion is a loaded word – it is what drives us, motivates us or gives us desire. This same passion he wants for us. Some have lost their passion. The heart, a metaphor of the very core of our being can die with respect to knowing and living out a life that encompasses the fullest of a person's humanity. Like the parable of the seed, a lesson about how God's word changes people's lives, some seed gets eaten up before it has a chance to grow; some seed falls on rocky soil and cannot take root; some seed falls on soil choked with thorns representing the cares of this world and still some seed will at last fall on aerated, fertile soil, that allows it to grow.

From our readings today, the passion for life God wants for us is threefold: His desire is to be known as He is, the I Am; secondly, His desire is for his people to follow the spiritual Rock who is Christ; and thirdly, His desire is for our growth to be productive in our faith.

It is amazing how so many misjudge God and his desire for his people. Since the days of Moses, people hunger for "holy ground" and a vital experience of His holiness. He beckons toward him and bids us to remove what stands in the way of direct contact. And the common human reaction to God's invitation is what? It is always fear – fear of what God might do to us if we are impure in our thoughts, if we feel unworthy in his presence, if we feel that we deserve only to go to hell! It is sad that so many see God in this way. God is "I Am" and he desires his people as a lover desires his beloved.

It is not difficult to understand why God is not trusted. God's desire for justice and righteousness is true. Because of the lack thereof in the lives of "our ancestors" St. Paul tells the Corinthian Church God was not pleased when they tested Him. Yet his mercy is everlasting. He knows He must welcome us with the "carrot" rather than with the stick. He bids His people to enter the Promised Land. He wants to give us milk and honey. Instead, people blunder and fall.

People get lost in the wilderness. And they think therefore that God has abandoned them.

Falls are by definition unplanned and unexpected events. Some of you have fallen and broken bones requiring lots of time to heal. A study on falling conducted in 2005 recruited volunteers 75 years and older. They were divided into two groups: those that had two or more falls in the previous year and those who had NOT fallen in the previous year. Then the researchers studied how the volunteers in the two groups walked.

What they discovered were three factors that distinguished how each volunteer moved: 1) those who had fallen had had less clearance between their toes and the floor during their gait than the non-fallers. 2) The inclination of their the soles of their feet relative to the floor was less than that of the non-fallers. 3) the fallers had more lateral sway of the trunk of their body compared to how far apart their feet were spaced during the stance phase of their gait. The combination of these factors predisposed those possessing them to trip and/or fall more easily.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul said, "So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall." Elsewhere he says, "So walk carefully, as those who are wise."

William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury back in the 1940's, gave us another way to think about the things that trip us up. As an undergraduate, he went to hear a well know American evangelist preach about God's forgiveness of sins. This preacher used as his text, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Temple said, "Though I went to the meeting in a serious, enquiring spirit, I found myself quite unmoved, for, alas, my sins were not scarlet, they were gray – all gray. They were not dramatic acts of rebellion and violent self-affirmation, but colorless, tired sins of omission, inertia and timidity." I love the British way with words! And what Temple describes is likely the way of many of us. Small sins are small falls and we may not recognize that they take us away spiritually more and more from Christ the Rock.

One of the images sometimes used of a spiritual fall is that of archery. The archer shoots the arrow at the target. His aim is right but when he looses the arrow, it doesn't make it all the way to the intended destination. Instead, short of the target, it falls to the ground. The bowstring was not pulled back far enough. A spiritual fall can be

like that. Failure to grow spiritually and in strength of numbers can be a matter of not giving the arrow all we have!

If God desires us to know Him as the great "I AM", and He desires us to walk after the spiritual Rock, He certainly desires us to grow and be productive in our faith. A farmer, and we have a family of farmers in our parish, can only allow a crop a specific growing season. Whether it is corn, wheat or soybeans, crops have a certain life span. Once full grown they are ripe and the harvest must begin. There is no choice. Farmers do what they do not just for the pleasure of watching plants go through their cycle of life. All the work, all the time and all the investment of capital points to the harvest. There must be a harvest for there to be growth and profit. A farmer must be passionate about growth or he is out of business!

Jesus parable of the fig tree speaks of the passion God has for our growth and productivity. And our heavenly father is patient for the harvest but there is a time when inspection of the crops must come. Three years is a divine time set. He goes to His gardener and he demands a return for his investment. God has invested His Son and the passion he bore during Lent. And when there is no growth, Jesus says to the Father, "Let me work the soil a bit more and see whether the fig tree will produce." We don't have an epilogue to that parable. It must be that God is still waiting to see whether we will take His passion seriously. I hope we will. The end of Three years is coming sooner than we think. AMEN.