## Isaiah 55:1-13

 **1** "Come, all you who are thirsty,
       come to the waters;
       and you who have no money,
       come, buy and eat!
       Come, buy wine and milk
       without money and without cost.

 **2** Why spend money on what is not bread,
       and your labor on what does not satisfy?
       Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
       and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

 **3** Give ear and come to me;
       hear me, that your soul may live.
       I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
       my faithful love promised to David.

 **4** See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
       a leader and commander of the peoples.

 **5** Surely you will summon nations you know not,
       and nations that do not know you will hasten to you,
       because of the LORD your God,
       the Holy One of Israel,
       for he has endowed you with splendor."

 **6** Seek the LORD while he may be found;
       call on him while he is near.

 **7** Let the wicked forsake his way
       and the evil man his thoughts.
       Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him,
       and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

 **8** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
       neither are your ways my ways,"
       declares the LORD.

 **9** "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
       so are my ways higher than your ways
       and my thoughts than your thoughts.

 **10** As the rain and the snow
       come down from heaven,
       and do not return to it
       without watering the earth
       and making it bud and flourish,
       so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

 **11** so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
       It will not return to me empty,
       but will accomplish what I desire
       and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

 **12** You will go out in joy
       and be led forth in peace;
       the mountains and hills
       will burst into song before you,
       and all the trees of the field
       will clap their hands.

 **13** Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
       and instead of briers the myrtle will grow.
       This will be for the LORD's renown,
       for an everlasting sign,
       which will not be destroyed."

## 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

 **1**For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. **2**They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. **3**They all ate the same spiritual food **4**and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. **5**Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

 **6**Now these things occurred as examplesto keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. **7**Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." **8**We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. **9**We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. **10**And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

 **11**These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. **12**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! **13**No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. *And God is faithful; God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

## Luke 13:1-9

 **1**Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **2**Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? **3**I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. **4**Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? **5**I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

 **6**Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. **7**So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

 **8**" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. **9**If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

“Our Teachers”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

March 23, 2025

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I want to talk about all three of our scripture lessons today, because this week’s sermon has ended up being very different from what I had planned. No, this didn’t mean rewriting this morning, as it often does. Lately, and not for the first time in the past several years, I have found myself thinking about all the places and people I learn from –that people learn from, in general—and discovered that reading today’s *lessons* can tell us a lot about our teachers. So, we are going to spend some time thinking about who are our teachers. From whom and from what do we learn and grow? You can start thinking now, about who or what has taught you the greatest lessons in your life.

Why do we learn from these people? What do we give them that makes us listen to them? We hear and have heard today, “Listen, that your soul may live! Listen, that you might bear fruit!” These aren’t just empty words floating in the sanctuary.

One of the lessons whose details I have to look up in old notes, which I have recently shared with Ann, has to do with something called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. In a Christian view of the world, authority is created by four things: Scripture, which in a visual image may be conceived of as a circle in which the other three elements are contained and overlap with each other, those being tradition, reason, and experience. This is an image that lets us know Tradition, and Reason, and Experience are those other things to which we look for authority. The Prophets, people we have listened to through millennia, and the Word, which is to say Scripture and Tradition. Other examples of tradition we learn from Paul. All of those early letters from Paul to early churches are some of the traditions that teach us how we are supposed to behave and what we are supposed to understand about this world of ours.

The we have the fourth piece, which is Reason; we have our good minds that will help us understand, to weight plusses and minuses, pros and cons, to weigh what we have seen in history and predict in future. We also have the experience and reason that is Jesus himself—God incarnate, for those of us who understand Jesus as carrying divinity; and Jesus as teacher, for those of us who understand Jesus with that lens. Jesus saw the world in a particular way and responded to it, and asks us to respond in like manner. We believe what he said, because we have seen that his way of living works—for peace and contentment. So, Christians who came before us struggled, and we struggle. Early Christians debated over what to believe. And we debate what to believe, but back then they had huge gatherings, councils, about what one should believe. So, for millennia, Christians would unite in their faith and even profess together what they believed in the words of a creed. I was reminded of this this week while working on our website, in which we state quite simply that we are not a creedal church. You do not have to believe exactly what I believe in order to be a member of this church.

There is a reason that we call our readings from the Bible each Sunday our “scripture lessons.” They teach us—about how to view life, and about how to live life. While the scripture lesson from Isaiah is, indeed, about the hope that we can have in looking forward to being in God’s land—for the Jews, in returning to Jerusalem, it is also about a people who needed that reassurance. We often need reassurance, and the message from Isaiah is clear. Listen! God is with you, and promises you great things, even when you can’t see them yet yourself. Does anybody feel like they need to hear that today?

Paul is a great teacher. He speaks things plain, and his sermon for today is just perfect for Lenten preparation and transformation. Don’t give up on trying to be as good and as right with God as you can be. Sure, you will be tempted. Our faithful forebears were tempted, and didn’t always fight against it sufficiently. But we can! We have examples in our faith history that can show us how to be strong. And, in one of my favorite passages from scripture, we learn how God stands right with us in the midst of and against temptation of all kinds. In the first several verses of our passage from Luke, we hear a familiar kind of question, whether those who experience difficulty—even difficulty that includes barbaric slaughter and Pilate’s mixing the Galileans’ blood in Roman sacrifices—whether those people must have somehow sinned and were therefore being punished, not by the Romans under Pilate, but by God. Jesus teaches us that no one of us is more sinful, but that we all can be more responsible for our actions and repent of the things we do that betray our relationships with each other and with God. God does not want us to be cut down, but has taught us the way we can nurture one another into fullness.

Christ, our Lord, is our best teacher. In response to today’s passage from Luke Rev. Barbara K. Lundblad says, “Maybe the vineyard is the whole earth. Maybe it's the church. Maybe it's your life and mine. Jesus isn't giving up on any of us--you, me, the church, the whole earth. There's hope in this parable--don't cut the tree down. But there's also urgency--give me one more year.”

I wonder today, though, if you are concerned that *waiting* implies inactivity. I hope that you hear with me amid the challenges to the way of life we have come to know, with its freedoms and its attempts at equality, that we are not meant to stand idly by. So, I wonder if you might join me for a moment as we consider from whom and from what we have had our best examples of forbearance, of love, of prophetic words, of compassion, of mercy.

*In our sharing aloud together, we learned of spending time with a former partner in the months before his death, continuing to be inspired by his patience and devotion—and joy! Also, she shared that her daughter is an inspiration for having home schooled her child for a year and a half. Her child has challenges to which her daughter responds with compassion, with patience and with love. For another, parents were the guides for behavior and involvement in issues in the world. For another, shadowing a parole officer who taught her another way of responding to challenging behavior with calm compassion. Another shared that in a kind of role reversal, she learned from her son in dealing with his own difficulties with such forbearance, compassion and love.*

Might these examples be the way that God has given us a way to pass the tests that life presents? Maybe we can continue our conversations during our time of fellowship to wonder how may we also be the way that God provides others the way through temptation, through life’s testing?

So, we prepare ourselves—for life, and for death. We lean on scripture to learn about the experiences of other people of faith, and so to learn about how to live our own lives. We rest in faith, on scripture; on what we know from all our Christian teachers—ancient and current; on what our good minds lead us to believe, and on what we have experienced. We may differ in some of our main beliefs, but we also land in our tradition, on some basic and core actions in response to our call to love. Even in these most challenging of times in which we are tested and tempted, and our patience is tested and our forbearance may be measured, we can rest in those who taught us, and focus on the way we can be and can teach others.

Let us pray: Loving, merciful, and forgiving God, teach us the way to live as you have asked us to live, challenging authority when it runs contrary to your Word and supporting all who feel weakened by their challenges. We thank you for your wisdom and pray it might be ours. In Jesus’ name, Amen.