



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

CYCLE C

Exodus 3:1–8, 13–15

1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12

Luke 13:1–9

GATHERING

(A crucifix is displayed on a table covered with purple cloth. A fire burns in a fireplace, if available, or several lit candles stand on a table. Some sheets of paper along with pens/pencils are kept on reserve)

Last week's session was focused on how we find God's presence in the darkness of our lives. This gathering begins with some sharing of what action people have taken to discover God in the dark places this past week. The facilitator invites anyone who may wish to share something they may have written in their journals.

OPENING PRAYER

(The room lights are turned out. The group sits in silence and gazes at the burning candles or crackling fire.)

The Chuck Girard song, "Slow Down" is played. It can be found on Utube. When the music concludes, a reader, equipped with a flashlight, reads this week's account from Exodus. The group continues to sit in quiet for another minute before the room is returned to light.)

Focus Question

What gets in your way; keeps you from slowing down? What do you notice when you do slow down?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

Moses sees what others do not see--the bush that does not burn out. He sees perhaps because he is able to slow down and because he is curious. Moses notices not just that the bush is burning, but that the bush is not consumed. In his noticing, Moses recognizes the presence of God. Might others have passed this way and seen the burning bush? But perhaps, too anxious, too rushed, they did not stop. And, perhaps, as a consequence, they missed the presence of God in their midst.

Lent is about slowing down, slowing down enough to reconnect with God; to encounter God. It is about letting go of our busy lives and so many of those things that we think are so important. Lent is about repenting of that busyness prevents us from discovering God's powerful and captivating presence. When we are able to slow down we have the opportunity to experience our God as all-consuming and all-present and all-encompassing.

When Moses asked God what name he is to call God, God replies, "I am who am." God refuses to be boxed in. God cannot be reduced; summed up; explained away; contained. It is God who does the naming and not the other way around. Try as we might, we cannot comprehend the magnitude of our God. We are unable to fully grasp the mystery of our God. Yet all that we need to do is repent and accept the God's constant generosity and forgiveness.

In this week's gospel, Jesus' parable concerns the man who had a fig tree which bore no fruit. It would seem that the sensible thing is to cut it down. So often we use the same logic of this owner. The vine dresser suggests another way. "Leave it another year while I hoe around it and manure it. Then perhaps it will bear fruit." Jesus is telling us of God's

incredible mercy and generosity. Because of God's mercy we are given a second chance.

Ultimately, we are to bear fruit. Often it is the "manure" in our lives which can best assist us in bearing fruit. The very trials and tribulations that come into our lives, often in unexpected ways, can be the source of our best growth. It is not always easy to see these times as opportunities to bear fruit. But these times are often the very ways that make us better able to slow down and better able to find the God that Moses found.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. What are ways that help you choose to slow down? Name an experience that forced you to slow down.
2. How does slowing down assist you to encounter God?
3. What parts of your life offer themselves as *manure* for new growth?
4. When you slow down, what are the things to which you sense God is asking you to pay attention?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. Slow down this week by choosing a time to sit quietly by a fire or a lighted candle. Allow time for "I Am Who Am" to speak to you. Listen and then journal in response.
2. Seek out a person (eg., family member, friend, co-worker, parishioner) whom you suspect needs a listening ear, heart. Perhaps go out to breakfast with that person or have him/her over for coffee. Take care to create an opportunity to just listen and be attentive to this person.

3. Take time this week to write a long overdue letter to someone waiting to hear from you. Reflect back to this person the light that he/she is to you and/or others.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Buddha was once asked, "What makes a person holy?" He replied, "Every hour is divided into a certain number of seconds and every second into a certain number of fractions. Anyone who is able to be totally present in each fraction of a second is holy". *(Extended pause.)*

(With some quiet instrumental music in the background, the facilitator introduces a time for journal writing. He/she encourages members to keep the hand moving, not being concerned about grammar or spelling, or even planning ahead of time what to write. To help people get started, the facilitator introduces the following question: As a result of this session's conversation, what is God saying to me? About ten minutes are allowed for writing.)

Leader: God, our Father, we ask that we are able to be present to you. Help us to slow down this coming week and during this Lenten season so that we might be better able to discover you. Help us to be freed from our anxieties and busyness. May we empty ourselves of so much of what we think is important so that you might fill us with your healing power and redeeming love. We ask you to show us the purposes of our wounds and burdens. Show us the way to carry out your plan for us. We ask these things through Jesus, the Christ.

All: Amen.