



The Road Less Traveled

Weekly Devotional Readings and Guides

March 24-30

- ◇ ***Week 3 Lenten Discipline: Choosing to Give:** Our God is a God who pours out sacrificially, the ultimate example being Jesus, the Incarnate Word. This week you are challenged to explore your gifts and talents and creatively use them to serve those around you. What gifts has God given you and how are you using them for the Kingdom? How are you giving of your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness?
(For more on Lenten Disciplines, see the box on page three of this study guide.)*

Monday, March 25 Read Psalm 63:1-8

Look closely at vv.4-5. What do they mean for you and your experience with God? Are the psalmist's sentiments familiar to you? Why or why not? Share your thoughts on this with God in prayer today. _____

Tuesday, March 26 Read Isaiah 55:1-9

None of us has enough time, money or resources and every day we make decisions about what we spend those precious commodities on. How does Isaiah address these critical decisions? What is the 'rich food' he suggests we devote ourselves to and how can we do it? _____

_____ Prayerfully consider how your life is prioritized just for today. Where is God in that?

Wednesday, March 27 Read Luke 13:1-9

Parables and stories were used by Jesus to reveal something about the nature of God and God's will. What is Jesus trying to say about how God works in the story about the Galileans and the tower? _____

What is He trying to say in his parable of the fig tree? _____

Why do you suppose these two stories are told together and how do they relate to each other?



The Journey of Lent: Week #3

Thursday, March 28 Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Paul warns the Corinthians that simply because your family is part of the faith story, doesn't mean that you have become an active part of it. Many nominal Christians feel that simply because their name is on a church role or they have a positive mental acceptance of the existence of God, that is sufficient. How would you respond to someone like this?

Friday, March 29 Read John 15:1-8

Explain Jesus' metaphor of the vine and branches in your own words. How can we abide in Christ in 2019? _____

How do you? _____

How would anyone know you do by looking at your life? Use some specific examples and lift these up in prayer today. _____

Sermon notes for

“The Jeopardy Theme Song”

Luke 13:1-9

- 1. Life's fragility reminds us that our primary focus needs to be on what God wants of us.**

- 2. If life is to be used to bear God's fruit, are you bearing fruit in:**
 - ...new and nurtured relationships?**

 - ...making and growing disciples?**

 - ...serving and loving others?**

Saturday, March 30 Read Psalm 65

Read this psalm through then close your eyes and think through what you see, hear, smell and experience in this song of praise and devotion to God. What does this tell you about God?

About humanity? _____

About the relationship between God and humanity? _____



The Road

Less Traveled

Small Group Discussion Guide

Read Luke 13:1-9 out loud then work through each of the two portions of this passage with the exercises below.

Lenten Disciplines

Week #3: Choosing to Give

When we join a church we make certain promises as to the part we will play in our shared ministry. In the UMC, we vow to support our church family through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. In sum, we promise to give ourselves to the church's mission. This week you are challenged to reflect on what it means to give of ourselves to ministry, and to repent of our propensity to take more than we give. Here are a few disciplines to practice:

- **Prayerfully consider your talents. Don't practice false modesty here...they were given to you by God after all! How are you generously giving of your talents to your brothers and sisters?**
- **How do you use your material resources to support the church? If you don't tithe already, can you commit to giving 2-3 % more? Do you give regularly or just when you have some extra?**
- **What needs do you see the church having? Consider that your awareness of those needs might be a call from God. How can you be a part of meeting those needs?**

Part 1: *The Galilean Martyrs (Luke 13:1-5)* *Jesus here addresses a misconception that is still common today, namely, is suffering, tragedy and injustice a result of our sinfulness and does God award both punishment and blessing in proportion to our actions. The question is relevant for anyone who has asked "What did I do to deserve this?" or thought "God must be punishing me!" While our actions do indeed have consequences, Jesus is trying to get his disciples (and us) to see the bigger picture.*

- How would the fate of the Galilean martyrs and the people killed in the accident in Siloam be different in the minds of Jesus' listeners (remember, resisting Roman occupation was patriotic but it was just as likely for innocents to die in the arbitrary ruthlessness of the occupying troops)? What attitudes about death, suffering and injustice are implied here? What do Jesus' listeners probably feel is God's role in these two tragedies?
- Surely the victims at Siloam at least had nothing for which to repent. Why does Jesus link these two events? Twice (v.3 & v.5) Jesus calls his listeners to repent. For what? Why? What is Jesus saying about the "big picture" as it concerns life and death, sin and justice, God and His People? What is your definition of 'repentance'?

Part 2: *The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)* *In Hebrew culture the fig tree symbolized both prosperity and God's providence. The ancient idiom "to sit under his own fig tree (Micah 4:4; 1 Kings 4:25)" was a way of saying God is smiling on and blessing me and all is right with the world. A barren fig tree implied departure from God's plan and a failure of faithfulness.*



The Road

Less Traveled

- Break down the symbolism of the parable: Who does the vineyard owner represent: _____ Why? Who is represented by the fig tree: _____ Why? Who does the gardener represent and why? _____
- Is the owner being reasonable here? Why or why not? Look closely at v.7. Given who is being represented by the fig tree, what warning is Jesus trying to convey? _____ What is the 'fruit' here demanded by the owner: _____
- What do the actions of the gardener symbolize (v.8)? _____
- How does this parable illustrate what Jesus was trying to teach his followers concerning sin, death, injustice, time and repentance?

Part 3: A Message for our time- Read John 15:1-8. In what ways is this instruction similar to the material we have studied so far? Discuss the following questions:

- What 'fruit' does god expect of us as his disciples? Give specific examples.
- Of what do we as a church need to repent (Actions? Attitudes? Again, be specific)?
- (For yourself)- What fruit do you think God expects *you* to bear? What hinders you from doing it? What would repentance look like for you personally?

Part IV: *If you have time, share some of your experiences with fasting this week. What did you learn and what were some of the ways it strengthened your faith experience? Why?*