Third S in Lent/25 Meditation
Isa. 55:1-9; I Cor. 10: 1-13; Lk. 13: 1-9.

Second Chances or Grace at Work?

". . .let them return to the Lord . . .and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."(Isa. 55:7b, NRSV); "My soul is satisfied. . .when I think of you in the watches of the night." (Ps. 63:5,6, NRSV); ". . .Sir let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. . ." (Lk 13:9, NRSV);

Among the leaders and bishops in The United Methodist Church, retired or in the active relation, there's one who is visibly nimble. In retirement from the episcopacy in the Philippines, Bishop Rudy Juan doesn't betray any sign of slowing down. He's equally comfortable riding on the ubiquitous carabao, ensconced in an airconditioned van, or in a rugged jitney in trying to reach a church where he's invited yet again for another centennial. And while at ease in the company of society's upper crust, where he witnesses to the faith in terms people see themselves, he doesn't shy away from those struggling along in the journey, broken in spirit or down to their very soul. This bishop believes in what they call second chance or, in Methodist parlance, grace at work. That's what I had witnessed him, remotely, doing in recent weeks. I could go on to specifics but that would have to be in another context.

We don't hear much about second chances these days. In fact, we do not hear about second chances at all. Our present day culture is so focused on lifting up number one as the only thing that matters. Nothing else counts in the hyper competitive, me-first culture world in which we live.

But there is a world where second chances are the rule, not the exception. It's a world openly envisioned by the Hebrew prophets, especially those of the eighth century. It is where they preached that there was a God who will "abundantly pardon." It was a message so liberating that reassured people not to have to wallow in guilt nor grovel in their misery as losers as a result of their failures or misdeeds. Israel alone, through its prophets, saw a world in which compassion was at work, not damnation nor condemnation. And where God was seen as people-friendly, to whom one is able to return, and receive not just welcome, but pardon in abundance. That looks to me like grace at work, in the language of our faith.

Then as we move along during these days and Sundays of Lent, and consider the things happening in our world, where lies are presented as the truth simply by putting up media outlets capable of reaching millions; and witnessing the misuse of power for personal aggrandizement, and harnessing it for personal gain, wealth or prestige. It is enough to send you crazed with madness, and toss restless in the watches of the night. Yet in all of this – even in the belly of the beast, the psalmist shows us, just like the prophets, like Isaiah did - something so liberatingly profound. For in all of this, we still can think of the God who presides over all of creation and, will ultimately see to it that God's will be done. That's what truly satisfies. And so we conclude with a prayer, "Dear Heavenly Father, we ask that you show us how your Spirit works in and through us in days when we grow weary, and the "long night, dreary" and by grace, receive power for the living of these days; through Jesus, we pray. AMEN."

Joy and peace,
Pastor Ben
Rev. Dr. Ben Vinluan