

Lenten Devotional February 19, 2021

Scripture

Deuteronomy 7:12-16

12 If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the LORD your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; 13 he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. 14 You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock. 15 The LORD will turn away from you every illness; all the dread diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you. 16 You shall devour all the peoples that the LORD your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

Devotional

The Rev. John Culp '98

"That's not fair!" Most of us probably said it a time or two—or 20—to our parents when we were small. Some of us tend to feel that way on a regular basis through most of our lives. We may even be inclined to make the accusation against God.

These lines from Deuteronomy 7 give us ammunition for that charge, don't they? Along with many other verses from the Old Testament, they paint for us a picture of a deity who showers blessings on his people Israel—routinely at the expense of innumerable Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, and an unfortunate army of assorted other "ites."

But that decidedly—outrageously!—unequal treatment is of course baked into the cake of what it means to be God's chosen people. It's his recurring pattern: Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; David, not Eliab or Abinadab or Shammah. And to magnify His "unfair" preference, the Lord stubbornly *continued* to bless the children of Abraham (droughts, plagues, and victorious oppressive enemies notwithstanding), even through their wearying, seemingly incessant rebellion and rejection of his rule over them. ". . . *heed these ordinances . . .*"? Not even close!

If Lent teaches us anything, it should surely be that time and again we are those maddeningly disobedient, ungrateful children of Abraham. We can't even lay claim to the family tie, most of us, on the basis of blood. At least not our own. And if we're ever inclined to shake a fist heavenward, railing against divine injustice (isn't that at least *most* of us, from time to time?), we do well to remember also that the *last* thing any of us should ever demand from God is justice. Mark Twain may have been a skeptic, even an unbeliever. But he surely got this much right: "If heaven went by merit instead of grace, your dog would get in and you would not."

May these days of somber preparation send each of us to our knees in genuine confession and sincere repentance. May they send us to the cross, where we can rejoice that God gives us infinitely better than justice. He gives us mercy. He gives us Christ.

Prayer

Gracious God, how amazing is the love in which you have provided a Savior for us in your beloved Son! Thank you, dear Lord! Please give us the further grace to glorify you in these days of Lent by growing ever more into his image. Send us to our neighbors near and far with the message of hope you have given us in Jesus. We ask it in his glorious name. Amen.