

Lenten Devotional March 27, 2023

Scripture

Jeremiah 24:1-10

1 The LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. This was after King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the artisans, and the smiths, and had brought them to Babylon. 2 One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. 3 And the LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten."

4 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 5 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. 6 I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. 7 I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

8 But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who live in the land of Egypt. 9 I will make them a horror, an evil thing, to all the kingdoms of the earth — a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. 10 And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they are utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their ancestors.

Devotional

The Rev. Scott Dennis '13

During our journey of Lent, we move from our usual, comfortable piety and practices—which can easily become routine and feel like ‘cheap grace’—to what seems like a spiritual exile of law and penitence, regret and sorrow. However, the good news for us is that if we did not have special liturgical seasons and changes, like Lententide, then it would be all too easy to be complacent in cheap, easy grace, and thus we would rot like bad figs. Such easy spiritual complacency could rot us to the extreme point that we rotten figs would be “a byword” and “a horror for evil to all” (v 9) before the witnessing world which seeks to mock, denigrate and ignore the Christian faith.

Fortunately, grace means that God, in the freedom of his love, chooses to move us to a better place for a season until it is time to return to the place of comfort, familiarity, and joy. We do not enjoy exiles, be it Babylon or Lententide. Yet such a season may produce a bountiful harvest of good figs for the benefit of us, our brothers and sisters, and those not even born yet, who themselves shall have their own Lententide exiles, if we preserve the fire of the faith tradition into which God calls us to sojourn and serve. Surely this is what is meant by our Lord’s promise to give us “hearts to know that I am the Lord and they shall be my people” (v 7).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we continue our Lententide sojourn that ends beholding you upon the cross, give us those hearts which you promise to give us for love and service. Indeed, help us to finish our sojourning exiles by looking forward to beholding your empty tomb and arriving back to our spiritual homes in the promised land of your grace. Amen.