

LENT: JOURNEYING TO THE CROSS

Second Sunday in Lent
February 28, 2010

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17—4:1
Luke 13:31-35

Prayer of Tears¹

Lent is a solemn time of reflection. Many give up something that is an integral part of their lives in order to intentionally think about God and pray more. Throughout my tenure as a minister, I have heard some really interesting stories about what has been given up; however, there continues to be the standards: chocolate, wine/alcohol, television, swearing, etc. I heard one parishioner jokingly say – I think – “Pastor, I’m going to give up church for Lent. I think it would be good for me.”

On a more serious note, I wonder what Jesus would say about the world in which we live today. Jesus’ words from Luke 13:34 force me to grapple with this question. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (*NRSV*) What if we substituted the city in which we lived for Jerusalem in this passage? New York, New York... Los Angeles, Los Angeles... Chicago, Chicago... Or even our smaller cities and towns: Wilton, Wilton... Shaw, Shaw... Garland, Garland... What would Jesus say about us? Would he lament over us the way he lamented over Jerusalem?

This is a good question for Lent. As we contemplate what we have given up, I wonder what kind of world we could live in if we could all agree to give up war and poverty and discrimination and hatred and rape and pollution and all other forms of violence. These are not just “big” words. They are global realities that are destroying the world that God created. They are also realities that are not beyond our control.

During this season of Lent – or just this week of Lent – we would do well to acquaint ourselves with what Richard Foster calls the Prayer of Tears. “Tears are a sign – not an infallible sign, to be sure, but a sign nevertheless – that God has touched [our] center. Through the Prayer of Tears we give God permission to show us our sinfulness and the sinfulness of the world at the emotional level. As best I can discern, tears are God’s way of helping us descend with the mind into the heart and there bow in perpetual adoration and worship.”² Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.

¹ This is a chapter title in Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco; Harper San Francisco, 1992), pp. 37-46.

² Foster, p. 41.

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit www.wiltonbaptist.org to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Costa Rica – With thanks to God that Bible-based programs have improved the behavior of young people in the country and that marginalized communities and poor children have been reached, and with prayers for wisdom and guidance for the Bible Society team and for the starting of new projects and the consolidation of existing ones; **El Salvador** – With thanks to God that elections in the country were free of violence and with thanks for God's continuous protection from the meaningless violence of youth gangs, extortion, and murder, and with prayers for God's continuous protection and for plans to develop the *Bible Panorama* project to help bring peace to the country; **Nicaragua** – With thanks to God for the success of the project for street children which is blessing nearly 400,000 children with Scripture Portions and Selections, and with prayers for the printing of the Miskito Bible and for God's guidance for the government to bring peace, justice, and prosperity to the country.

Activity Corner: "Heavenly Citizenship" Certificates

Supplies needed: Bible; parchment paper (or beige or offwhite construction paper); star stickers (or scrapbooking stickers); gold notary seals; markers, pens or pencils.

When writing to the Philippians, Paul drew upon citizenship as a metaphor, reminding them that Christians should view themselves as citizens of a heavenly commonwealth (Philippians 3:20). For Paul, "heavenly citizenship" is set over against an earthly mindset and the prized Roman citizenship of the colony of Philippi. Paul's reference to Christ as "Savior" implies a contrast with the Roman emperor who was also called by that title. In the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5–7), Jesus outlined a vision of God's kingdom or empire—an alternative to life under Rome's oppressive imperial rule.

Read Philippians 3:17–4:1 and discuss the meaning of citizenship. What does it mean to be a citizen in one's own country today? What are the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship? How does earthly citizenship contrast with what Paul describes as "heavenly citizenship?" Encourage everyone to express their thoughts.

Invite everyone to create a "Citizen of Heaven" certificate. Encourage each one to include wording that expresses their faith and hopes as well as their commitment to live their lives in ways that reflect Jesus' example of love and service. Suggested wording:

CITIZEN OF HEAVEN CERTIFICATE

[Insert Philippians 3:20]

[Insert name] is a follower of Jesus and a Citizen of Heaven
called as a Child of God to

[Insert wording that expresses faith, hopes, life of service, etc. For suggested wording, consult various Bible passages such as Matthew 5:3-12; Matthew 22:37-38; John 3:16; John 14:6; Romans 12:9-21; Ephesians 1:3-6.]

Create a border with star or scrapbooking stickers and affix a gold notary seal. Conclude by praying together Psalm 27:1, 13-14.