Lectio Divina – 3rd Sunday in Lent Year C

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2nd Century tradition names the work for Luke and claims he was the same person as the companion of Paul. However, there are significant differences between Paul's writing and what appears in Luke about Paul's writing which seems to suggest that the author of Luke was not the Luke referred to in Paul's letters.
- Author is clearly an educated man and a city-dweller, not a country-sider.
- Sources include Mark's Gospel and the Q source and a good deal of other material.
- From Mark: the narrative detail about Jesus' life
- From Q, the 'sayings' (teachings) of Jesus.
- Don't really know where the other material comes from, e.g. the infancy & childhood narratives.
- Work is addressed to "Theophilus" which means, "Lover of God" – this could be a specific individual, or simply every Christian.
- An ordered account of life of Jesus and apostles
- **Structure of Luke's Gospel**
  Following the author's preface addressed to his patron and the two birth narratives (John the Baptist and Jesus), the gospel opens in Galilee and moves gradually to its climax in Jerusalem

  A brief preface addressed to Theophilus stating the author's aims;
  1. Birth and infancy narratives for both Jesus and John the Baptist, interpreted as the dawn of the promised era of Israel's salvation;
  2. Preparation for Jesus' messianic mission: John's prophetic mission, his baptism of Jesus, and the testing of Jesus' vocation;
  3. The beginning of Jesus' mission in Galilee, and the hostile reception there;
  4. **The central section: the journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus knows he must meet his destiny as God's prophet and messiah;**
  5. His mission in Jerusalem, culminating in confrontation with the leaders of the Jewish Temple;
  6. His last supper with his most intimate followers, followed by his arrest, interrogation, and crucifixion;
  7. God's validation of Jesus as Christ: events from the first Easter to the Ascension, showing Jesus' death to be divinely ordained, in keeping with both scriptural promise and the nature of messiahship, and anticipating the story of Acts

Luke 13:1-9 – things to notice

- This story is part of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (from 9:51 to 19:28 see 4. above). Note: it fills 10 whole Chapters in Luke!
- This episode is only found in Luke.
- There are two parts: Jesus commentary on the fate of crucified Galileans and victims of the tower collapse at Siloam, and a parable about the fig tree. There is a marked contrast in tone between the 2 sections.
- There does not appear to be any historical or other biblical evidence of either the crucified Galileans or the tower collapse at Siloam.

- Jesus uses 2 instances (the Galileans crucified by Pilate and those on whom the tower fell at Siloam) to say that these disasters did not befall the victims because they were notorious sinners. Perhaps it was a common thought at the time that disasters were punishments that God inflicted on sinners. Jesus indicates this is not so. And, how we love to think that bad things happen to bad people! And, how we love to point out self-righteously the perceived faults of others. We love to tell stories of disasters, too. So, in many ways, this is a very 'human' situation Jesus finds himself in.
- Note: Jesus shows no sign of outrage, hatred or vengeance when told of Pilate's cruelty to his fellow-Galileans.
- Jesus gives a stark warning: if you don't repent, you will perish as they did! – Repent before it's too late. A call not to look at others and their sins, but to look at the condition of our own hearts – an invitation to do a bit of soul-searching.
- Note: repentance is not being sorry for individual sins, it is the action of conversion, of turning around to face in a new direction (towards God), change of mind and purpose, changing the direction of your life. Note: very often the Old Testament scriptures speak of 'turning back to God' – see the first reading for Ash Wednesday.
- Parable of the barren fig tree – note the dialogue between the owner of the vineyard and the gardener. The gardener urges patience with the barren tree and argues for it to be given one more chance to bear fruit. Note: the tree is not left to do this on its own – the gardener will nurture it and nourish it, but his patience is not endless. If the tree still produces no fruit, it will be cut down. I think, however, that the gardener is quietly confident that his careful tendering of the fig tree will succeed.
- Note that Jesus puts the ideas of repentance and bearing fruit together – bearing fruit is a sign of repentance.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

Temptation, Transfiguration, Repentance & Forgiveness & Lent
Note the first reading – God appears to Moses in the 'burning bush'; God is moved with compassion for the suffering of his people in Egypt, God means to rescue and save them and bring them into the 'land of milk and honey', the naming of God (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) recalls the God of the Covenant.

If we take the Gospels of the first two Sundays (temptation and transfiguration) as a parable about Christian life (a journey out of and away from temptation and into being transfigured by God's grace), the Gospels of repentance and forgiveness (this Sunday and next Sunday) give us the 'road map'. We make the journey from temptation to transfiguration through repentance and by opening ourselves to God's mercy and forgiveness.

The Gospels of this Sunday and next help to answer the question: how will God act towards us if we stumble and fall? They reassure us of God's mercy and forgiveness. The parable of the fig tree in today's Gospel and the parable of the forgiving father in next Sunday's Gospel express God's extraordinary kindness and patience.

These Gospels also call us to repentance. Repentance is not about sorrow for individual sin or failure. Repentance, like conversion, means to 'turn around', to 'face in a different direction'.

The whole Season of Lent is about turning our lives around so that we face more and more towards God. We resist the temptation to evil and choose to be tempted by God's goodness. God's forgiveness is not an easy 'out' which enables us to continue to live a bad life. The warning to repent 'before it's too late' is meant for the unresponsive disciple. The true disciple already knows that Christian life is a continual act of turning more and more towards God. At every moment of our turning, we are accompanied by God's forgiveness and love which bring us to life and enable us to bear fruit.

By following Christ, we learn how to turn more towards God so that God's grace might be seen more clearly in us.

Reflection
If the Gospels of the first two Sundays of Lent (temptation and transfiguration) are a parable about Christian life (a journey out of and away from temptation and into being transfigured by God's grace), the Gospels of this Sunday and next give us the 'road map'.

How do we get from temptation to transfiguration? Only with repentance and God's forgiveness. That's the road map for our Christian journey.
Oh, how we love a good story about disaster befalling someone else! The strength of Jesus reply to those who told him about the crucified Galileans seems to indicate that they shared this news with some delight.

Jesus' reply tells us not to assume that bad things happen only to bad people and not to think that disasters are some kind of punishment for sin; stop thinking about the guilt of others and put your energy into repentance – turning back towards God.

The parable of the Fig Tree which follows answers the question, 'If we do repent, what sort of reception will we get from God?' God will work with us like the gardener in the parable. He will treat us with kindness and tenderness and nurture us back to life so that we can produce good fruit.