

## Third Sunday in Lent



Keeping  
a Holy Lent

# You Are Better than That

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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“You look happy.” That’s what a woman behind the counter said to me. Another said, “He’s always happy when he is here.” I replied, “What’s not to be happy about?” I really enjoy that place. A young man from northeast Lincoln wanted to learn how to barbecue, and travelled all through the country spending time with the best barbecue-ers. He came back to Lincoln and opened up Phat Jack’s. His name’s Matt.

It was a quick visit. My friend and I were talking a mile a minute. My little “table in the wilderness!” Forty-five minutes of joy in a week full of 1,000 details! It’s hard work to bring together and coordinate information from all our study groups: organ study, building upgrades, two energy-saving consulting programs for which we may qualify, a comprehensive engineering report on our heating/AC systems.

Lots of different groups in the church are working on these matters, and we can now get the projects’ information together and set priorities.

There in Phat Jack’s excitement about the future and joy in the moment made for a truly happy lunch. Later I wondered: why am I not that happy no matter *what* I’m doing. An old hymn’s words came to mind:

My Shepherd will supply my need: Yahveh is God’s Name;  
In pastures fresh God makes me feed, beside the living stream.  
God brings my wandering spirit back when I forsake God’s ways,  
And leads me, for all mercy’s sake, in paths of truth and grace.  
When I walk through the shades of death God’s presence is my stay;

One word of Your supporting grace drives all my fears away.  
Your hand, in sight of all my foes, doth still my table spread;  
My cup with blessings overflows, Your oil anoints my head.

The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days;  
O may Your house be my abode, and all my work be praise.  
There would I find a settled rest, While others go and come;  
No more a stranger, nor a guest, But like a child at home.

Last week was full of positive interactions, God moments, steps forward. What joy when our 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade Basketball Team won church league! Yet, I’ll admit working on so many fronts left me a bit tense.

In today’s portion of the Gospel, Jesus is with the home folks. After all he’s been through he now hears threats from Herod. He needs to relax.

Instead, the home folks try to rile him: What are you going to do about the fact that Pilate killed a whole group of our fellow Galileans? Please tell us they died because they sinned. If you can explain violence as the victim’s fault, you don’t have to fear it quite so much.

This is a truth about self-righteous anger. Anger by itself doesn’t feel good. But we think that if we can make things someone else’s fault, if we season our anger with us-vs.-them talk, if we self-righteously deride someone, that’s somehow a little more fun.

Jesus says today’s passage and then launches into parables that culminate in the **Prodigal Son**: the Parable of the **Mustard Seed**, The Parable of the **Yeast**, You are the **Salt** of the earth, **Great Banquet**, the **Lost Sheep**, the **Lost Coin**.

Jesus is saying to his home folks: Something **huge** is starting to happen.

You are a part of it. Keep your focus on the huge picture. Don’t try to pick a fight with Pilate. You are bigger than needing to blame victims for violence.

**You are bigger than that** is a phrase that we use to keep others and ourselves from “taking the bait,” from getting sucked into a fight, from taking a side issue and making it the main issue.

**You are bigger than that** can also help us remember  
who we are and whose we are.

Do you remember the movie *The Lion King*? Simba the lion cub, heir to the Kingdom, runs away from his home. Simba thinks he can live better on his own. This goes fine for a while: Simba enjoys singing with a meerkat and a warthog, eating grubs, and lolling lazily in lagoons. As Simba says, “I just needed to get out on my own, live my own life. I did, and it’s great.”

After a while Simba has a vision of his dead father, speaking to him:

**You have forgotten who you are, and so have forgotten me.  
Look inside yourself Simba, you are more than you have become... Remember who you are. You are my child.**

In all sorts of ways we become less than who we are. We’re not alone. The home folks tried to rile Jesus to retribution and violence. Self-examination lets us see ways we too, commit little acts of violence: I am so upset, and unless you are upset with me, you are not listening to me. Language of “they -us.” Focusing on minute issues and missing the big view.

Jesus tells his home folks then and us now, **You are bigger than that.**  
**Remember who you are and whose you are.**

We start Lent by taking stock of ourselves. Any time you find yourself saying or doing things like Jesus’ home folks, stop and refocus (that’s what repent really means). So anytime you are tempted to make a big deal out of a side issue, please remember, **You are bigger than that.**

The phrase we use to help a child avoiding a fight at school when he feels that another is making fun of him is the same phrase we use when we realize we ourselves need to refocus our lives: **You are bigger than that.**

Paul worked hard with people in Corinth to get them to not focus on side issues. He wanted to move them beyond their idea that “if they did the right things life wouldn’t be such a struggle.” He pointed out that we are all rich, no matter what we struggle with. Grace, the complete love of God through Christ—is all that truly matters. We need to hear his words today:

<sup>6</sup>We conduct ourselves with innocence, knowledge, patience and kindness ...

in sincere love, <sup>7</sup>with the message of truth and the power of God, wielding the weapons of justice with both right hand and left—

<sup>8</sup>whether we are honored or dishonored, spoken of favorably or unfavorably.

We are called imposters, yet we are truthful...

<sup>10</sup>sorrowful, though we are always rejoicing; poor, yet we enrich many.

We seem to have nothing, yet we possess everything!

<sup>11</sup>We have spoken frankly to you, Corinthians; we’ve opened our hearts wide to you.

<sup>12</sup>We’re not holding anything back; you, though, are holding back your affection from us.

<sup>13</sup>It would be a fair exchange... my children—if you’d open your hearts as widely to us as we do to you.

Midway through Lent our focus shifts from personal issues to the big picture.

Jesus tells his home folks, and us “**Something huge is starting to happen:**”

**Don’t focus on side issues. You are bigger than that.**

The Good News of Grace is that it’s not up to us on our own to find the strength to be “bigger” than the circumstances we face. We don’t have to stant alone.

Jesus is saying that we part of something that is so big that all the issues we think are issues are minor by comparison.

If you see me smile today it’s because of a joy that’s far deeper than being at Phat Jack’s. This is a table in the wilderness of details of our lives—that makes our hearts glad. *For everyone born, a place at this table. It makes us bigger than we think we are.*

**OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE—ISAIAH 55:1-3, 6-9**

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant.

<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while God may be found, call upon God who is near;

<sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way, and unrighteous their thought; let them return to the Lord,

that God may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,  
says the Lord.

<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your  
thoughts.

**EPISTLE LESSON—II CORINTHIANS 6:3-13**

We take pains to avoid giving offense to anyone, for we don't want our  
ministry to be blamed.

<sup>4</sup>Instead, in all that we do we try to present ourselves as ministers of God,  
acting with patient endurance amid trials, difficulties, distresses,  
<sup>5</sup>beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.

<sup>6</sup>We conduct ourselves with innocence, knowledge,  
patience and kindness in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love,

<sup>7</sup>with the message of truth and the power of God,  
wielding the weapons of justice with both right hand and left—

<sup>8</sup>regardless of whether we are honored or dishonored, spoken of  
favorably or unfavorably.

We are called imposters, yet we are truthful; <sup>9</sup>we are called unknowns,  
yet we are famous;

we are said to be dying, yet we are alive; punished, but not put to death;

<sup>10</sup>sorrowful, though we are always rejoicing; poor, yet we enrich many.

We seem to have nothing, yet we possess everything!

<sup>11</sup>We have spoken frankly to you, Corinthians; we've opened our hearts  
wide to you.

<sup>12</sup>We're not holding anything back;  
you, on the other hand, are holding back your affection from us.

<sup>13</sup>It would be a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—  
if you'd open your hearts as widely to us as we do to you.

**GOSPEL LUKE 13:1-9** At that very time there were some present  
who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their  
sacrifices.

<sup>2</sup>He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way  
they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

<sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

<sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—  
do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in  
Jerusalem?

<sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

<sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he  
came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, 'See  
here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find  
none. Cut it down!

Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup>He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more  
year,

until I dig around it and put manure on it.

<sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"