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SUNDAY READINGS

24 March, Lent 3

Almighty God,

whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully
grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none
other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your
Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Eternal God, give us insight to discern your will for us, to give up
what harms us, and to seek the perfection we are promised in
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 55:1-9: An Invitation to Abundant Life

Ho, 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.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13: Warnings from Israel's History

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to

everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Luke 13.1-9: Repent or Perish

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

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. 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?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." '

<p>Readings for 31 March, Lent 4, Mothering Sunday, are: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 2:33-35 or John 19:25b-27</p>

Good news from New Zealand by Rodney Nicholson

We were shocked by the shootings in the New Zealand mosques nine days ago, which killed 50 Muslims at Friday worship. We derive a small crumb of comfort from the arrest of the 28-year-old Australian far-right murderer. At least the coward has not cheated justice by dying himself in the aftermath. Nothing takes away the anguish of those families caught up in the horror, and yet for the rest of us there is good news.

First, the international response highlights the essential goodness of the world. If our world were evil through and through, then

people would shrug their shoulders and say, "Who cares?" We might add that our concern can be one-sided, in that the crimes committed by the state against the Rohingya Muslims in Burma and Bangladesh have stopped troubling us, whereas an attack by one individual in a white, Commonwealth country like New Zealand, can hurt us more deeply. Similarly, repeated horrific acts in a distant land, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, affect us less sharply than a much smaller attack in France or Spain, which are nearer home. That said, the world is outraged, and rightly so.

Second, the response of Faiths coming together was heartening. The Archbishop of York immediately sent a message of condolence, saying that we, along with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and also the Jewish people, are all children of Abraham. Churches in New Zealand gave every support they could to their Muslim friends, both in prayer together and in practical action. When we think of York's past history of massacring Jews and crushing to death the saintly Roman Catholic Margaret Clitherow, we can rejoice that we have come a long way in peace and reconciliation.

Third, there has been widespread praise for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Her genuine compassion was obvious, expressed in her readiness to hug those affected. Political leaders may kiss and hug each other in a conventional but empty way, whereas Jacinda's warmth was transparent. In last Sunday's Gospel reading Jesus compared himself to a hen gathering her chicks under her wing. We need that human, as well as divine, warmth. To touch is important.

We do not know why Brenton Tarrant hated Muslims so much. In his heart there was unfathomable evil, perhaps sickness. If we multiply that evil a million times, we glimpse a fraction of the darkness in which Jesus was enveloped on the cross. Yet his immersion in those terrible waters brought healing to the world he came to save. In him there is hope and victory.