

A Way other than Our Own

Devotions for Lent

Walter Brueggemann
Compiled by Richard Floyd

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An Old Identity Made New

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.
—Isaiah 55:6–7

These verses are a familiar call to worship or a call to repentance, not a bad accent for Lent. The face of God shown here is of a Lord near at hand, ready to forgive, *a God of grace*. But this is a God to whom a turn must be made, *a God of demand*, a God of demand ready to be a God of grace . . . not just hard demand, not just easy grace, but grace and demand, the way all serious relationships work.

The imperative is around four verbs, “seek, call, forsake, return,” good Lenten verbs. But this is not about generic repentance for generic sin. I believe, rather, the sin addressed concerns for Jews too eager to become Babylonians, too easy to compromise Jewish identity, Jewish faith, Jewish discipline—in order to get along in a Babylonian empire that had faith in other gods with other disciplines. The imperatives are summons to come back to an original identity, an elemental discipline, a primal faith.

I suggest, moreover, that these are just about the right imperatives for Lent among us Christians. For I believe

the crisis in the U.S. church has almost nothing to do with being liberal or conservative; it has everything to do with giving up on the faith and discipline of our Christian baptism and settling for a common, generic U.S. identity that is part patriotism, part consumerism, part violence, and part affluence.

The good news for the church is that nobody, liberal or conservative, has high ground. The hard news is that the Lenten prerequisite for mercy and pardon is to ponder again the initial identity of baptism . . . “child of the promise,” . . . “to live a life worthy of our calling,” worthy of our calling in the face of false patriotism; overheated consumerism; easy, conventional violence; and limitless acquisitiveness. Since these forces and seductions are all around us, we have much to ponder in Lent about our baptismal identity.

Lent is a time to consider again our easy, conventional compromises and see again about discipline, obedience, and glad identity. And the climax of these verses:

that he may have mercy . . .
for he will abundantly pardon.
Isa. 55:7

The word to the compromised deportees is that God’s face of pardon and mercy is turned exactly to the ones who reengage an identity of faith.

*God of grace and demand, you challenge us to
reclaim our baptismal identity as those whose lives
are built on your call and your promises—not on
the easy, seductive forces around us. Stir our hearts
that we may engage your transforming word anew
and rediscover its power to save. Amen.*

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