

Genesis 12:1-4

2 Timothy 1:8-10

Matthew 17: 1-9

So: has anyone here ever lived through some hard times?

You won't be alone - you can raise your hand.

But every crowd looks that way

because everyone lives through hard times.

It may not be happening right now, but it has

and you'll likely face hardships again.

That's part of life and no one escapes that.

St. Paul writing to Timothy and to us, says,

*Beloved: Bear your share of hardship for the gospel  
with the strength that comes from God.*

Hardship. Hard times.

But Paul writes here of a particular kind of hardship:

hardship for *the gospel*.

Hard times that come from faithfulness to the gospel of Christ.

Everybody has difficulties,

whether you believe in the gospel or not,

whether you believe in God or not, everyone has hard times.

But only Christians can possibly have *hardship for the gospel*.

Nor should we mistake the sacrifices of Lent

as hardship for the sake of the gospel.

When we get to heaven's door and Jesus asks,

"Did you suffer for being faithful to my word?"

And if our best answer is,

"Well, there was that one year I tried to give up desserts for Lent" -

I don't think that's going to impress him very much.

-- I don't think that's what St. Paul had in mind.

But Lent is an excellent time for us to look at this hard question.

What might such hardship look like?

The gospel calls us to love one another as God has loved us.

That's a tall order.

Who are the persons in my life

who would occasion *hardship* for me

if I truly made the effort to love them?

Not just to endure them, or put up with them,

but to love them...

The gospel calls us to sell what we have and give to the poor.

What would I need to give, how *much* would I need to give,

what would I need to give up,

what would I need to let go of  
such that it would be a *hardship*  
for me to be *that* faithful to the gospel?

The gospel calls us to be people of truth.  
What lies would I need to let go of, make right  
such that my honesty would be a *hardship* for me to bear  
for the sake of fidelity to the Lord?  
Those questions make giving up desserts for Lent look pretty easy.  
Those questions may be a hardship in themselves,  
just to consider them.  
But that's exactly what Paul encourages Timothy and us to do

Jesus took his friends up the mountain  
and he was transfigured before them.  
They fell down before Jesus in awe and fear.  
Jesus did this to give them a glimpse of his *glory*  
so that they would be prepared for witnessing  
the hardship *he* would bear  
when they witnessed his suffering and death,  
his share of the gospel's hardship...

And that's the real question in the scriptures today  
and in this Lenten season:  
what part of me will I allow to die  
so that I might live the gospel more faithfully.

The questions are big and they face us every day:  
Who do I need to learn to love?  
What in my life consumes me  
and what do I need to let go of?  
What lies do I live, day to day,  
and what truth do I need to make my own?

Lots of work for all of us in those questions  
but as St. Paul promised, God gives us the strength to tackle them,  
beginning here, at this altar,  
this table where Jesus nourishes and strengthens us  
with his *share of the hardship he bore for the gospel*,  
the bread and cup of the Eucharist.

And he invites us:  
Come to the table and eat and drink this holy food,  
given to make you strong  
that you might bear your share of hardship for the gospel.

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