

Third Sunday in Lent, March 23

The Collect and Psalm will be read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer
The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel will be read from the New Revised Standard
Version Bible

The Collect: Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Exodus 3:1-15

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of

Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12 He said, “I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

13 But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’ ” 15 God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Psalm 63:1-8

1 O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; *
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you,
as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.
2 Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, *
that I might behold your power and your glory.
3 For your loving-kindness is better than life itself; *
my lips shall give you praise.
4 So will I bless you as long as I live *
and lift up my hands in your Name.
5 My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, *
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,
6 When I remember you upon my bed, *
and meditate on you in the night watches.
7 For you have been my helper, *

and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

8 My soul clings to you; *

your right hand holds me fast.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

10 I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

6 Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 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." 8 We must not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. 10 And do not complain, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 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. 12 So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. 13 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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

13 At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3 No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. 4 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 other people living in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”

6 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. 7 So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘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?’ 8 He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

The Gospel of the Lord

On March 28 we celebrate the life of James Solomon Russell, Priest. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

James Solomon Russell was born into slavery on December 20, 1857, near Palmer Springs, Virginia. He became known as the father of St. Paul’s College (one of the three historically Black Episcopal Colleges) and was the founder of numerous congregations, a missionary, and a writer.

He was the first student of St. Stephen’s Normal and Theological Institute (which later became the Bishop Payne Divinity School) in Petersburg, Virginia. In 1888, one year after his ordination as a priest in The Episcopal Church, Russell and his wife Virginia opened St. Paul’s Normal School in Lawrenceville, Virginia. Russell’s vision for the school was to provide both a literary and an industrial education. Religion was a mandatory subject, and students attended chapel twice daily. Russell served as the school’s principal and chaplain until his retirement in 1929.

For 52 years of ordained ministry in the Diocese of Southern Virginia, he worked tirelessly to encourage black candidates to enter Holy Orders so that they could care for the growing numbers of black Episcopalians. In 1893, Russell was named the first Archdeacon for

Colored Work. Southern Virginia had the largest population of African American Episcopalians in the United States, thanks in large measure to Russell's evangelistic efforts. In 1927, Russell was the first African American elected bishop in The Episcopal Church. However, he declined election as Suffragan Bishop for Colored Work in the Dioceses of Arkansas and North Carolina, and he was glad that his action helped defeat the idea of subordinate racial bishops.

Russell's ministry continued until his death on March 28, 1935. His autobiography, *Adventure in Faith*, was published the following year.

Let us pray: God, font of resurrected life, we bless you for the courageous witness of your deacon, James Solomon Russell, whose mosaic ministry vaulted over adversity; allure us into the wilderness and speak tenderly to us there so that we might love and worship you as he did, sure of our legacy of saving grace through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, always and ever.

Amen.