*Look upon us, O Lord,*

*and let all the darkness of our souls*

*vanish before the beams of thy brightness.*

*Fill us with holy love,*

*and open to us the treasures of thy wisdom.*

*All our desire is known unto thee,*

*therefore perfect what thou hast begun,*

*and what thy Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer.*

*We seek thy face,*

*turn thy face unto us and show us thy glory.*

*Then shall our longing be satisfied,*

*and our peace shall be perfect*

*In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good morning! Good morning at home!

One of my favorite characters in the Marvel movies is Thor. I'd never really cared for him when I read some of the Avengers comics as a kid; he always seemed kind of serious and hard to approach as a reader. But in the movies, (especially in the more recent ones) Thor is presented as kind of a goofball, a lovable oaf, cocksure, and quite aware of his immense strength, even as he has terrible trouble with his relationships. When you watch Thor in the Marvel movies, just like the rest of the cast of their superhero movies, you are meant to relate to this character. You are meant to relate to his bad attitude, his interpersonal problems and overall drama, all while enjoying the fact that in the fiction, Thor is the God of thunder and storms and wields a magic hammer made of metal from a meteor. Marvel borrowed Thor from Norse mythology, and if you spend any time looking at Norse mythology like I did back when I was a kid, you quickly notice that Thor is just, kind of the worst. The Marvel character is much funnier and with way less wanton violence.

But whatever way we enjoy Thor, we are confronted with a very human (small g) god. He's got some real sweet powers but he's still as capricious, judgmental, and vindictive as we can be. I bring up Thor because he's a pretty decent example of what human beings so often come up with when they try to consider the divine. In considering a couple of ancient pantheons, the gods really seem to like messing with us because they are probably upset about something or other.

And the human reflex to think about the divine drama as essentially as petty as our human drama own runs deep. It's a major contrast to the God we find when we crack open our Bibles. There we find a (big g) God that is faithful, traceable, just, and true. In fact, I think that it's very interesting that when God speaks to Moses, his address is filled with his faithful promises, how he has heard the cry of his people of promise, and that he very much wants to help the people with whom he has established promise.

Moses, who at first seemed so eager to figure out the whole perpetually burning bush thing, doesn't seem super enthusiastic to tell the rest of his Israelite people that God is once again stepping in to help them. Maybe he's thinking that this burning bush god wants to mess with him like that trickster god Seth he heard about growing up in Pharaoh's house. Perhaps that's part of why when God makes His Name known to Moses with the immensely mysterious and grammatically challenging phrase, "I am that I am," it's a statement of wildly radical being. God's name as presented to Moses is to be presented as a wholly different *type* of being, one that does not need other things to be and therefore just *is.* And circling back,the God who wants to stake a clear claim on his radical "is-ness" means to make a radical claim on this people in order to keep his promise made all the way back with that one guy from Ur of Chaldee, Abraham.

So, Moses comes to learn that the God of his ancestors is quite different from the gods of his neighbors, from the gods of Egypt and Canaan, and the other parts of the Ancient Middle East. But careful readers of the Scriptures will find quickly that people do not give up thinking that God is just like them very easily. The story doesn't even make it out of the book of Exodus before the Israelites start to make that mistake.

By the time of Jesus, that human reflex to think that God does things for the same reasons we do is well in effect. That's pretty much why he ended up having this brief conversation that we read about from Luke's account of the Gospel story. Set within a far-ranging set of teaching and preaching, apparently Jesus responded to some folks around him who assumed that bad, truly calamitous things were happening to people because they were so sinful that they had to be wiped out. That tracks with human behavior more than God's: when we get mad it's time to clear the decks. As we can see even now in the news in Ukraine, humans have a real hard time not visiting wrath and bloodshed on other humans for one reason or another. But when the Bible tells a story about God's justice being disregarded, those that are practicing injustice are given a chance to turn things around. Many times, if there's only a tiny bit of turning things around, God will relent. Examples abound, but Genesis 18, Exodus 32, and a few times in Isaiah and in Jeremiah come to mind.

So, when Jesus connects repentance to calamity, I think he means to show that regardless of what befalls human beings by nature of misadventure, misbehavior, accident, or otherwise, there is always a chance for a person to repent and turn to God. This little parable about the fruit tree at the end of today's lesson is meant to reorient Jesus' audience view about repentance. He wants people to know that instead of thinking that God is the type to act capriciously, God is, as announced to Moses, "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." With that in mind, one way to think of this parable is that Jesus is the one who would make the soil of humanity's hearts healthier by his ministry and call to repentance. Jesus' call on our lives is meant to help us turn away from the dry and unhealthy soil of our brokenness so that we can enjoy God's goodness, light, and life.

In this third week of Lent, I wonder if we wouldn't benefit from taking some time to consider how our understanding of God might have more to do with the human-shaped small g god of Thor, versus the actual teaching of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Our view of God can be so strangely affected by the brokenness we endure, the effects of sin on ourselves and one another. But this week, let's ask God to further reveal how great He is, to show us how much He loves us in his faithfulness to us. Jesus showed us what divine love really looks like by nature of his self-offering on calvary and showed us the great power of God by his raising Jesus to new life. We have seen his glory revealed to us in the cross and passion, therefore I pray that God would remind us that

We have gazed upon Him in His holy place, \*

that we might behold The Lord's power and glory.

To Christ who is the indeed the shining light of God be all glory. Amen.