

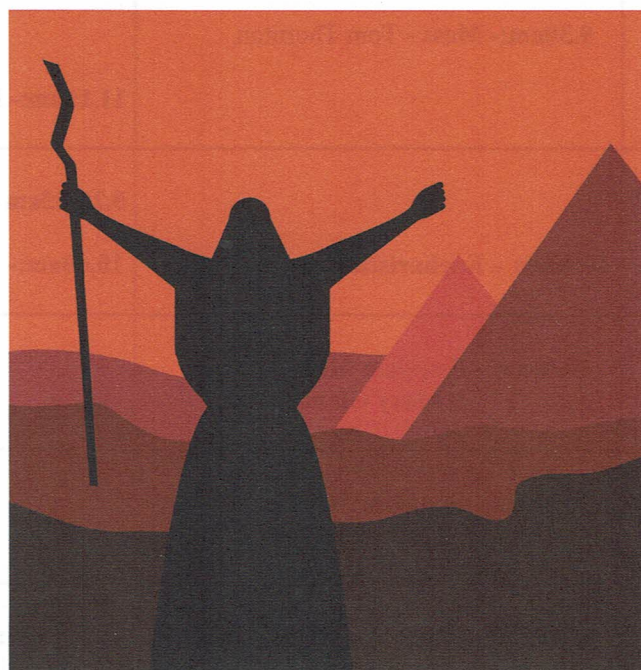
SUNDAY PLUS

Keep hoping

One More Chance

by Dr Bridie Stringer

At first glance, today's Gospel seems to show a harsh, judgemental Jesus, suggesting that unless there is some serious improvement, the people will perish in the most horrifying way. The mention of Pilate mixing the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices is a chilling foretaste of what will eventually happen to Jesus himself. However, we balance this dread against the Genesis story of vindication and rescue in the first reading. God has decided that, having heard the voice of the children of Israel in Egypt, "enough is enough" and he entrusts the action plan for escape to his servant Moses. The message of Jesus takes on a new meaning in the light of this earlier experience of the Jewish people.



Rescue is once more at hand. There will be one more chance.

We tend to think of the vineyard owner as the benevolent custodian of the land. We consider other vineyard owners in the Gospels – the one who hired workers throughout the day and paid them all the same living wage or the one who sent his son, only to have him killed by the workers. Jesus is not the vineyard owner but the gardener who tends the trees. He pleads for one more chance for the fig tree but concedes that if it does not then yield fruit, then it will perish.

Perhaps the message for us is that we too must tend to our roots and shoots so that we can bring forth good fruit in our lives and in the lives of those we encounter each day. They too deserve one more chance.

Dr Bridie Stringer is married with two daughters, a son-in law and "two adorable grandsons".

Ready and waiting

by Cowan Watson

In today's parable we see how the father's endless patience, always waiting in the hope and expectation that his youngest son will return to the fold, pays off. But what of his elder son? In many ways it's easier to identify with him. He's probably a decent sort of chap: a dutiful son and naturally aggrieved to see his wayward younger brother, having squandered his inheritance, being lauded while he himself is clearly not appreciated; not even allowed to celebrate with his friends now and again. Just a few beers and a goat for the barbecue! What he hasn't realised is, that while he may have never really put a foot wrong, neither has he understood that

the father's love has always been available to him; that his father also waits in hope with open arms to receive him too, if he could only just open his heart to experience it.

Cowan Watson is the editor of *Light of the North*, a quarterly magazine produced by the Diocese of Aberdeen.

"The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them."

Pope Francis

The unexpected excuse


by Catherine Pepinster

Moses is full of curiosity in this passage from Exodus.

Instinctively, he wants to know what is going on with the flames that do not burn the bush. It is not what he expects at all: God is present and has a plan, a plan of liberation for the people of Israel. What he wants is for Moses to listen. In Corinthians, St Paul warns what happens when people do not listen but look to forbidden things. Luke's parable is also about listening; the man looking after the vineyard is suggesting a plan. It may seem he is prevaricating but he is offering a way forward. Again, like Moses and the Corinthians, there is a sense here of someone wanting to rush in, to act fast.

But the vineyard cultivator knows his fig tree. This might seem as if he is trying to put off his boss, but it is the voice of reason versus impatience.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of *The Tablet* and the author of *The Keys and the Kingdom - the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis*, published by T&T Clark.

Lord of hope, let me trust in you even when I am faced with seemingly hopeless situations and it is hard to see the way ahead. You've "been there" before me. Help me  Amen.

Today:
Joshua 5:9-12
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Monday:
Isaiah 65:17-21
John 4:43-54

Tuesday:
Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12
John 5:1-3, 5-16

Wednesday:
Isaiah 49:8-15
John 5:17-30

Thursday:
Exodus 32:7-14
John 5:31-47

Friday:
Wisdom 2:1, 12-22
John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday:
Jeremiah 11:18-20
John 7:40-52

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 43:16-21
Philippians 3:8-14
John 8:1-11