

Third Sunday of Lent Year C

LUKE 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 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 others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." 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. So he said to the gardener, '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?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Message

In this season of Lent and throughout the year we continue to be reminded how much God loves us and forgives us. During this season of Lent, we are called to remember our Baptism, the time when we were marked and sealed as Christ's own forever. We must also realize that we are to support each child, and each person in their life in Christ. The paschal light and the refreshing waters of Baptism call us and strengthen us in our relationship to God and to each other. On this third Sunday in Lent we hear a parable told by Jesus which is meant to strengthen others to help them come closer to God and to each other.

In today's Gospel Jesus told a story to people who were around him. They were wondering about who was more guilty of their sins. They wondered, could it be that some Galileans who died as victims of Pilate's anger were the most guilty? Could it be that eighteen people who were crushed by the tower of Siloam are really the most guilty? They also wondered if they were guilty. Jesus responded to them by telling a parable, a story that is filled with mystery. Let's hear the story Jesus told to the people again As we listen together to these words of Jesus and think about what he was trying to say to them and to us.

Jesus said that at one particular time a man planted a fig tree right in the vineyard. It was a very special place for a fig tree. The sun shone on it, the rain watered it, it was regularly tended. When the time came for the tree to bear fruit, the man who planted the tree came looking for the wonderful delicious figs. As the man walked closer to the tree, he found the tree was empty, there was no fruit, there was nothing. He decided to wait another year to see if the tree would produce fruit. He waited and waited through the change in seasons but when he returned to the tree it was still empty; there was no fruit. The man, being a reasonable man waited one more year, but in that year when he walked to the tree he found the same thing: there was no fruit. He became angry, he told the vineyard keeper to cut down the tree, it was useless to him. The vineyard keeper however said that he would take special care of the tree, for one more year. He loosened the soil and dug around the tree so the rain could reach deeper into the

roots. He fertilized the tree it to give it nutrients it needed. We wonder what happened the next year. Was there any fruit when the man came back to the tree the next year? How would we answer the question as to who is more guilty?

If we look into our Gospel lesson for today according to St. Luke. When the people heard Jesus tell them that all were guilty, not just those killed by Pilate or those killed by the falling tower. Jesus said that absolutely everyone was in need of redemption, all needed to turn to God and come closer to God. The people must have wondered how much does God care for us, love us, if we are guilty? The parable revealed to them that God always gave them time to grow and to become fruitful.

Some 20 centuries later, we hear the same story, even though we live in a very different world. Our world has daily, random death and violence. The statistics of drug abuse, teenage suicide, and childhood violence are higher than the number of children who attend Sunday school every.

And we wonder who is responsible, who is the one who is more guilty. To hear this parable we are reminded that we are all guilty and that our turning to God to come closer to God takes intentional care, nurturing, and work. We are given time to grow; we are all constantly growing in our baptism.

The promises of the Baptismal Covenant are the fruit of our baptism. The promise to continue in the Apostles' teaching, in breaking bread, and in the prayers; the promise to repent and turn to the Lord; the promise to proclaim the Gospel, to seek and serve Christ by striving for justice and peace among all people, are not just made during worship or to be kept only when there is a Baptism. These promises are to be kept made in our daily life. Think of the promises as the fig tree. We know they need special care, protection, and that they need time to grow in order to bear fruit in our daily life.

The question is how do we keep these promises in post- modern world of consumerism where we all seek instant satisfaction, instant food ready to go, where TV and the music and entertainment industry give us the idea that promises do not matter and our children and youth generally choose sports over spirituality?

I would like to share with you four statements. Think of these as the hope you that should have been felt every time the man went to the tree to look for figs.

The first word is to "speak gently as the Lord spoke gently." Speak words of peace, words of hope, words of love. Think of the collect for purity, how we pray that God cleanse the thoughts of our hearts so that we are able to perfectly love. How many times do we speak the gentle words, Lord have mercy, and peace be with you.

The second word is "tell the truth of the Gospel no matter how tough it is." Think about how Jesus always brought the disciples to the truth of the matter. They wanted to know where do we find the Kingdom of God? Who is the greatest? Who has the most guilt? Jesus did not hedge, he told them the truth and that is what people want and need to hear. They want to hear from us that they are loved and forgiven by God.

The third word is, "be brave." The Gospel requires change. Every Sunday that we celebrate the Eucharist we ask to be given strength and courage to be sent forth into the world, into the culture, to bring reconciliation and peace.

The fourth and last word is, "Yield to Joy." Give laughter, look beyond the moment and find humour. Jesus often told the disciples that he came so that their joy be complete. This is the message of our Gospel lesson this morning. When the people were asking

who was guilty, Jesus spoke gently, yet he told the truth, he was brave, he told them that they needed to turn to the Lord, and then he told them to get brave and yield to joy by revealing the parable of the fig tree.

So, as we continue to grow in our Baptism this Lent. As we look toward the Easter Vigil, the paschal candle and the baptismal waters that await us, we remember the promises we have made to God and to each other, and we continue to seek ways to take these promises into our daily life.

Let us always remember the story of the fig tree, the hope of it being able to bear fruit after being given care and nurture and special attention, as we go forth taking the promise of our Baptismal Covenant into our world by speaking gently, telling the truth of the Gospel, being brave, and yielding to joy. For as find ourselves in the first quarter of the twenty-first century in this rapidly changing culture, it is both the most challenging time and maybe the best time to be a Christian. Amen.