**The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree**

Sunday 20th March 2022

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3rd Sunday in Lent

**Luke 13**

**New Revised Standard Version**

**Repent or Perish**

**13**At that very time there were some present who told him 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 others living in Jerusalem? **5**No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

**The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree**

**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 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?’ **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.’”

**~~~SERMON ~~~**

1. **Craft the “Me” section**.

Repent or perish! Well, if that doesn’t get you walking out of the door then nothing will. Hellfire and brimstone preaching we have all heard it have we not? It can be found in our churches, on the God TV channels which host some preachers that seem to focus on the need to be saved or you are condemned, probably a little too much. Then there are those street preachers with the boards saying “Repent for your sins! The end is near!”

But joking aside there is a serious side to this story that we don’t often visit, and it is a message that is well suited for this period of Lent, and this is the subject of repentance and our eternal future.

Lent, to me, is one of the greatest times of the Christian year. It is a time for reflection and for prayer and if done properly Lent can be a deeply enriching and spiritual experience.

The subject of repentance is vitally important, yet it does not need to be this hellfire and brimstone suffering message but can actually be a message of great Joy.

You see, we don’t talk about repentance enough because we don’t want to think about our own brokenness and mortality do, we? Regarding brokenness, we live in a culture that has the underlying current of “needing to be perfect” or “having it all” when in actual fact none of us do.

Regarding death, in the West we have a somewhat unhealthy idea about death don’t we because we don’t like speaking about it for obvious reasons?

We do absolutely everything we can to prolong life medically, sometimes not with the greatest of human dignity considered. Why do we do this, why do we have this unhealthy view of death. Well simply put, we are looking at the smaller picture,

<Holding up a long rope with a knot at the end>

the knot at the end of this rope represents life here and now, a life that is not all one track, rather it is twisted, bent, and sometimes frayed and damaged. Yet wonderfully plaited together by a divine creator, it can prepare us for the rest of our journey. This knot is but for a moment, however you view this moment and however your life draws to a close. But what we don’t see is the breadth of eternity ahead of us, this long, somewhat never-ending afterlife <drawing the length of rope closer>.

1. **Write the first “We” section**.

In our Gospel reading Jesus was asked if the Galileans where worse sinners hence the death they endured? Jesus’ answer was NO. And what about the tower of Silom? NO…(So the Galileans where murdered during their ritual sacrifices hence the blood being mingled by Pilate, and the tower fell and crushed 18 people during construction)

Jesus then went on to say that unless your repent you will suffer the same fate they did, in other words, your death maybe sudden and unprepared either by a natural death or the hands of the aggressor. And your sudden death leaves you no ability to then repent because, well, it is over.

We need this reminder of sin, repentance, and mortality more now than ever before, because we as a human race have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of G-d. And we continue to do so, day by day. You and I have sinned. In amongst this congregation here, sitting next to you or in front of you is someone who has said or done something of which they are simply not proud. None of us are innocent. This white collar, this means “set aside for a purpose” not holy, divine, or innocent.

So how do we repent of those things we do wrong to ourselves, each other and most importantly God?

Well first and foremost is the need of identifying the sin we are subject to; we can do this by self-reflection or discussions with a spiritual director or pastor. What sin are you struggling with or carrying? It is worth investigating this deeply because although you may not be engaged in a somewhat criminal or controversial sin, I think you will find anger, greed, jealousy, hatred, and many others are all sins to be dealt with.

We then need to enter into confession which in lent runs hand in hand with the penitence of the season.

All of us should be going to confession, all of us, even the clergy. But what do I mean by “going to confession” well there are a number of types of confession? The first is the corporate or Liturgical confession we do here today. This is before God in the silence of your own hearts lead by the Ministers. It is tied in with the liturgy and is there to help you along with making yourself right.

You then have the sacrament of Confession for those of us who fall under the catholic umbrella, confession, and absolution with a priest present. You also have the ability to enter into confession with God on your own, 1-2-1. At home or in the woods, or a quiet church.

No matter how you confess your sins though, do it with an open heart in spirit and in truth. Don’t just sit here and go through the words just because it is something you have said for the past 20 years. Actually, hold the sin before God with a repentant heart.

So, we have identified the sin, we have the confession, we than have the promise to never fall into that sin again. Knowing full well…we may fail, sometimes even at that very same sin. We then we turn to repentance again, striving harder this time.

1. **Point them to God**.

So where does all this fall into the barren fig tree parable, well, in case you have not yet figured this is all about repentance, or turning away from the sin, then redirecting down the right path and finally, and growth into new life. G-d is the one waiting for us to produce good fruit in our lives and the lives of others. He is wanting us to be fertilised and to have chance after chance to change our ways and grow into that image of Jesus, or as close to as we can become in this world. But if we continue down the wrong paths, if we don’t at least try over and over to turn from the things that offend G-d, others and hurt ourselves, if we continue to neglect passing on the teachings of Jesus love we are essentially bearing bad fruit or no fruit at all, we are barren.

**9**If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.

**4 Challenge them to apply what they’ve learned.**

Brothers and sisters, I do not stand here to condemn you, I am in the same boat as you. And I know this is a subject which carries a great deal of diverse thinking and feelings which have been debated for centuries but regardless of where you sit on this subject and your own mortality, repentance is a subject not to be avoided but rather embraced, because it was through the sacrifice of Jesus, and his complete love for us that we have forgiveness.

Yes, Jesus is love, Yes Jesus is mercy, but our part in the deal is to turn away from sin and turn to him daily.

Repentance, my friend, is the active identifying of our sin, turning away and redirecting our focus into new life.

**Let us pray.**

Lord, as we continue to evaluate our hearts and minds, help us to live a life of repentance and focus on you and on all that is good. So that our behaviour shows you as a shining light to the world around.

Amen.