

With All Your Heart
“Repenting”
Luke 13:1-9
Third Sunday of Lent
March 24, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Luke 13:1-9 (NRSV) 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.’”

A young woman wanted to talk to her pastor about the sin of pride. She said, “Every Sunday I come to church and look around and think to myself, ‘I’m the prettiest girl in the church. I try to stop but I just can’t. Am I horribly sinful?’”

The pastor looked at her and said, “No dear, not horribly sinful; just horribly mistaken.”

In the verses that Mel just read for us, some folks come to Jesus to talk not about their own sins, but the sins of others.

And Jesus tells them they are horribly mistaken.

In just these few verses we hear some powerful and important words from Jesus. In fact, as you listened, you heard Jesus repeat “unless you repent, you will all perish...”

Repent!

Repentance is a familiar Christian word.

It's often used by "fire-and-brimstone" preachers on T.V. who literally try to "scare the hell out of" their audiences.

But, frankly, there's probably not enough talk on the subject. It isn't something we bring up for dinner conversation. Who wants to talk about that?

I saw some recent surveys of Christians that seem to indicate that there's really no need to repent, for "we" are all basically good anyway...that the subject is a relic of the past and meaningless.

With books titled I'm OK and You're OK who needs repentance?

However, Jesus' words beg to differ! He made it really clear that day to the crowds (and today with us) that now is the time to repent.

Martin Luther, had it right when he said, "every day is a day of repentance."

In other words, repentance isn't something to put on the back-burner.

And to be clear, I include myself in the "US" of being a sinner and one of the "US" that can find it easy to live in denial.

It's human nature to procrastinate about the unpleasant things of life, isn't it? We hope it'll go away or, if we delay long enough, the unpleasant will take care of itself.

But, wouldn't you agree that our gospel reading is telling us that we can't procrastinate about what needs doing today?

I'm gonna encourage you to go home and read our lectionary OT reading (it's Isaiah 55:1-9.) When you read those verses you'll see the prophet's writing, say:

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return

to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

There’s no better time to take care of things, especially unpleasant things, than RIGHT now.

Today’s verses are a two-part teaching.

First, people have come to Jesus to report the horrific murder of Galilean believers while they were making sacrifices at the Temple. Pilate had them killed. It is a point of history for those Israelites, like 9-11 is for Americans. Or for the Christians recently murdered in Nigeria.

Jesus knows, too, about the eighteen people who were killed, just on the south side of Jerusalem, when the tower of Siloam collapsed on them.

These two, sudden and current events give Jesus a time to teach.

First, the audience needs to remember NOT to be tempted to assume that unexplainable events and circumstances are because of the judgement of God in response to sin.

Jesus says, in essence, “not so fast.”

It would be wrong to assume that the victims are somehow worse sinners than anyone else and deserved to die.

The second point Jesus makes, using those current events as a prompt is that *everyone needs to repent.*

He says, (twice) “...I tell you; ...unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Jesus highlights the importance of honest self-examination and for reprioritizing OUR commitments and actions.

We can all be honest and say, “It *would* be foolish to presume that I can delay getting ‘things’ right, RIGHT NOW.”

“Seek the Lord while he may be found,” Isaiah wrote.

Then, I don't know about you, but I kinda went "huh" with the lectionary inclusion of the fig tree.

Sometimes the parables help us go "ohhhh" 'cause we "get it."
And other times, they make us go "huh?"

I admit the parable about the fig tree started out with more "huh" than "oh"!
But Jesus, PRAISE GOD, enlightens us.

We hear about this fig tree that isn't producing fruit.
The owner of the vineyard wants to cut it down.
But the gardener bargains to save it for another year...that he'll put manure on it (that's what it says!) and see if he can get it to make fruit.

Luke doesn't record the disciples going "huh?" like in other gospels. So, we don't get a clear explanation from Jesus of just what he was getting at....this section of scripture then transitions into the healing of a crippled woman.

So what DID Jesus mean?

Well, first the parable of the barren fig tree is Jesus bringing home his point about NOW being the right time to make things right with God.
After three years of not bearing fruit, the gardener STILL asks for the tree's second chance...just one more chance.

Dear Ones, we're the fig tree.
And Jesus is, once again, our gardener.
He trims our branches and keeps the soil around us.
And he negotiates for our undeserved salvation.

Jesus is going to throw some manure around us...the fertilizer of God's Word, of Jesus' teaching, of the Holy Spirit's leading, to encourage us...AND to remind us that we'd better take the offered opportunity right now, every day, to repent and make peace with God and one another and be prepared to meet our Maker.

Father Andrew Greeley wrote a story to illustrate the importance of us doing things that need to be done right now, rather than procrastinating.

And except that it is a fictional story – many of us could put our names in it.

A couple **won** a trip Ireland and they had a whole year to make the arrangements and travel.

But, they already had obligations on their calendar...

“Not this summer, we always go to the lake.

Then the kids go back to school.”

Then it was the holidays.

“Let’s wait until after the new year.”

Then someone told them the days were so short in Ireland in January and February. And the weather wasn’t great then.

“So, let’s wait until May when the weather is better and the days longer.

So they finally made reservations for May even though they were cutting it close because their prize ran out on June 1, but they were sure “nothing would go wrong.”

Then the husband needed gall bladder surgery and the doctor said, “Yeah, he can travel...by the middle of June.

Funny?

NOT funny!

Dear Family of Faith, this season of Lent is a good time to act on the urgency of repentance.

Remember our verse from Joel 2:12?

“Even now,” says the LORD, “return to me with all your heart...”

Today is the time to do what needs doing, rather than putting it off or hoping, foolishly, that “things” will work out.

The Roman poet, Horace, would say, “Carpe diem”, “seize the day.”

It might not be there for you again.

We're NOT God – how's THAT for a spoiler alert, huh?

But God has given us a certain amount of time to act. We'd better "carpe" away!

Too often we deny this truth.

We say to ourselves, to others and to God,

- When I'm promoted I'll have more time to spend with my family.
- I can put-off visiting my parents and grandparents.
- Tomorrow I'll quit my addiction. I can quit any time.
- I'll get my life in order and THEN I'll start become involved at church.
- And, WHAT, what do I need to repent of?

I live a good life, care for my family, pay taxes, and stay out of trouble.

I'm going to hold a grudge against so-and-so because they don't deserve my forgiveness.

Oh Lord, those comments sound too familiar?

In our gospel reading today, Jesus encourages us to make the most of our time, which God has given us.

"This is the day that the Lord has made" isn't just a verse from the psalms.

Every day is a gift of God.

We are in constant need to return to the Lord, which is the literal meaning of the word repent.

Some days, our sin – could be of something we've done or thought or said OR something we didn't do and should have...sin makes it necessary for us to turn 180 degrees, completely in the opposite direction from the way we're going, if we are going to return to God.

We're about half way through Lent 2019...may this Lenten season be a time for our honest self-examination, for our ***"Seek[ing] the Lord while he may be found."***

That fig tree and its second chance?

That's US as we receive God's grace for our salvation. Even when we *deserve* to be cut down, our God is a God of grace; and "he will abundantly pardon."

Repenting and returning to the Lord is not having “the hell scared out of you” but it is a key part of our Christian lives.

It never feels good, and if it does, we’re doing it wrong, but it is necessary.

It’s what reminds us of our need for God’s grace while we display our growth in grace to those around us.

The fig tree does get one more chance...but it’s the last chance.

And, we can’t repent too soon, because we don’t know how soon it may be too late.” – (Thomas Fuller)

Praise God, that God’s gift of grace comes to us every day.

Amen!