

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022**  
**Lent 3 (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 55.1-9**  
**NT: 1 Corinthians 10.1-13**  
**G: Luke 13.1-9**

In our gospel reading this morning we see Jesus traveling through the towns and villages, telling parables, and healing people, making his way towards Jerusalem and his eventual arrest and execution. Luke rarely tells us where Jesus is, but he lets us know clearly that Jesus is traveling. It is lent and we are on this journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem. Luke shows us that even in Jesus' day people followed current affairs, enthusiastically discussed the latest news, and tried to understand its significance. In today's reading Jesus speaks to the crowds about two recent happenings in the city.

Luke tells us that some among the crowd report to Jesus a massacre of Galileans by Pilate. The second was the story relating to the collapse of the tower of Siloam. Whenever bad things happen, the human nature is to try to figure out, to answer the question, why? In our gospel lesson, Jesus addresses the assumptions of the people and challenges their conventional thinking. On these accounts Christ founded a call to repentance. Jesus' response would have shocked everyone. He called them to always be ready to face God. Horrible events do occur, whether deliberately by cruel governors such as Pilate or by imperfections in the kind of world we live in. One must examine one's own life and repent in view of the uncertainty of the future. Jesus in the gospel invites all to repentance and conversion of heart.

Luke then employs a parable about a fig tree, a landowner, and a gardener.

First, I want to tell you a story. There is a story about a boy who loves to play with his friend next door under a tree at the back of their house. One day his dad informs him that he would cut down the unproductive tree because for three years no fruit has come from it. The little

boy is hurt, and he shares the sad news with his best friend next door, and they both shed tears. Next day, the boy breaks his savings box and goes to buy a basketful of apples and with the help of his friend, he ties the apples on the tree. Next morning his father sees the tree with apples and says to his wife- I don't know how this is possible; suddenly the barren tree has apples on it, and the most amazing thing is that it is an orange tree. The little boy was trying to save the unproductive tree.

The second part of the gospel reading tells us about the parable of the unproductive fig tree. The owner of the vineyard comes searching for fruits on it over three years but found none, and he threatens to cut it down. However, it has been given another chance due to the intercession of the gardener. In the symbolic images of the Old Testament prophets, a fruitful fig tree represents Israel, but an unproductive fig tree represents Israel's failure in her mission to serve God.

The parable of the unproductive fig tree is a parable of our lives. When the Lord looks on us, he sees not just what we have failed to do in the past but what we can do in the future. In the parable, despite the tree not producing fruits, the owner is convinced to grant another year of life to the tree. In the same way God in his mercy grants us another hour and another day and another breath. The owner of a vineyard has grown tired of waiting for a fig tree to bear fruit. He tells the gardener -Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil? Time is up. It is a difficult passage but points again to the enduring love of God. Pope John XXIII once said: Time is God's gift to us; what we do with it is our gift to God. Together, today, we are called to finish this parable; to imagine our own ending during this season of lent.

What fruit is God looking for? It certainly must begin with the fruit of the Spirit, mentioned in the Galatians 5: 22-23: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and forgiveness. And the greatest fruit produced is love and

forgiveness toward all. We cannot judge our fruitfulness by the measure of others. Likewise, if I measure my Christian life against Mother Theresa, I have little to show. Yes, we have been cultivated, pruned, and watered. We are to bear fruit. We produce fruit that is useful to God, to each other, and to the world. God gives each of us the unique combination of gifts to bear fruit appropriate to us.

Francis of Assisi once invited a young friar to go with him into town to preach. Francis and the young friar spent all day walking through the streets and then came home. When the day's journey was done, the young friar asked, "Weren't we supposed to preach today?" Francis replied, "Son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We were seen by many. It is of no use walking anywhere to preach unless we preach wherever as we walk!" He summed up his idea in these words "Preach the Gospel everywhere, and if necessary, use words." To him witnessing to Jesus wasn't merely quoting some words out of the Bible from time to time but one who lives by the word of God each day.

Lent 2022 is a gift of time from the Lord so that we might become the type of tree that will bear much fruit. We have a vocation to be the body of Christ and we must live out that calling. The gardener in the parable is Jesus himself who continually intercedes for us. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist, we give thanks to him for all the blessings we have received - for our baptism, for the opportunity to receive his body and blood in the Eucharist, for his forgiveness in confession, and for his hope in us that we will bear much fruit. As we participate in communion in remembrance of Christ, we experience the presence of God in our midst, and we thank God for such goodness and patience with us.

Remember last week, we got an alternative picture of God as a mother hen. This week our gospel shows us another positive image of a loving God. The three readings assigned for today all touch on the importance of placing our hope in God.

May we always remain in Christ and go in peace to bear fruit with him that will last into eternal life. God's steadfast love abides forever, and his mercies cannot be counted.

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