

“One More Year!”
Rev. Robert H. Wade
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Luke 13:1-9

Read Luke 13:1-9

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or 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? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then 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. ⁷So 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?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

The Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

Watch or listen to any news broadcast or pick up almost any newspaper and you will be confronted with some mind-boggling tragedy in which people died because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, bombings in Iraq and Pakistan, and car accidents on I-70. In every one of these tragedies families and friends grieve the deaths and many ask the same question: “*Why?*” And some might take the questioning to another level by asking, “*What had these people done to deserve such a fate?*”

In Jesus' day this "*they deserved their tragic fate*" was the prevailing belief. The assumption was that disease, suffering and death were directly related to human sinfulness; the greater the sin, the worse the calamity. Even today, when misfortune strikes, many look over their shoulder and wonder, "*what did I do to deserve that?*" When we talk about bad Karma that's what we are essentially suggesting. Through the centuries people have sought to make sense of adversity and any connection it might have to our actions.

In our gospel reading we see a crowd of people coming to Jesus with the question of sin and punishment on their minds. It seems that some Galileans had been slain by Pilate and he had their blood mingled with the blood of sacrificial animals which would have been the worst sacrilege a Jew could imagine. Jesus, knowing what is on their minds, asks the crowd, "**Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?**" Jesus doesn't miss a beat answers his own question, **No, I tell you**; and then adds a challenge, "**but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.**"

Likewise Jesus reminds the crowd of the eighteen people who were killed with the tower of Siloam fell on them and he asks them, "**do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?**" Again, the same answer and challenge, "**No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.**"

So there it is.....Jesus flatly denies the commonly held belief that the Galileans or those who were killed in the construction accident were killed because they were "worse sinners." But that's not the issue he wants to pursue. Notice how he redirects the conversation back to the people, "**but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.**" It's like Jesus is saying don't worry about Pilate and the terrible things he can do and don't waste your time questioning *why* towers come crashing down on people's skulls. The most important thing is to make sure *you* are prepared to die. Let Pilate's brutality and the falling tower become your wake up call. Turn the spotlight on your own life so that you will turn away (repent) from those things for which you are ashamed and turn toward those things that would honor God and bring life to others and yourself. To press the point Jesus tells the story of the fruitless fig tree.

If there is one thing a fig tree is suppose to do it is to produce figs. A figless fig tree is no fig tree at all. It seems that a fig tree grower had a particular fig tree that wasn't producing figs for three straight years. He comes to his gardener, hands him an ax and tells him to chop it down. But the gardener says, "*Give me another year to nurture the tree and see if I can't get it to bear fruit. Just give me one more year and then if it hasn't produced figs, I'll cut it down.*"

One more year! Maybe the fig tree deserved to be chopped down but the gardener does not give up on the tree. Jesus doesn't give up on any of us....or the church... or the world. This is a parable of hope....give the fig tree one more year! The Lord wants to give us another chance, another season, another year to get it right and to live life as God created us to live. One more year to forgive those who have hurt us....one more year to make amends with those we have hurt....one more year to wash the feet of those closest to us....one more year to get out of the boat and do something that will make a difference....one more year to nurture our faith....one more year to redirect our ambition from making a living to making a life....one more year to learn the joy of generously....one more year to become the person God created us to become! Oh, what a gift....one more year! One more year to produce the kind of fruit that is pleasing to God! *What would that fruit be in your life?*

But there is *also* a sense of urgency in this parable....*only* one more year. We may have been drifting along in life, not doing much with the talents and opportunities God gave us. Short sighted and self-absorbed....thinking only of what's best for me....grabbing but not giving....squandering time...wasting resources. "*What if I had only one more year to live?*" *Have you ever pondered that question?* I know we don't like to think about death and especially our own death but there is truth to the saying, "*we can't begin to live until we face the fact that we are going to die.*"

Have I ever told you that I love cemeteries? I find them to be wonderful places to ponder my mortality....my past, present and future....into all eternity. Every tombstone has a birth date and a date of death with a dash in between. I find cemeteries to be wonderful places to ponder my dash....what's my life all about. *Am I just punching a clock or am I living fully as God would have me live?*

Cemeteries often bring me back to what is most important in life and I often find myself thinking of the first two commandments. It's as if God reminds me, "*Bob, in the dash that will make up your life I want you to love Me with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and I want you to love your neighbor as yourself.*" I meet God in cemeteries and I leave with a refreshed resolve to live life to the max each day bringing glory to my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer and bearing the fruit of love.

One more year! As you see on the cover of our bulletin, the gardener could have picked up the ax but instead he is holding the shovel. A shovel that will be used to dig around the fig tree that it might be prepared for fertilization. One more year for God to do God's good work within and through us. One more year....to come alive and bear fruit. What will you do with one more year?

I love the prayer from our Presbyterian Book of Common Worship....***Help us to live as those who are prepared to die and when our days here are ended, enable us to die as those who go forth to live, so that living or dying, our lives may be in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.*** Thanks be to God that our lives are in Jesus Christ. May we all go forth and live life fully!

Amen

