

Feb 28, 2016

“Giving a Fig”
Luke 13:1-9

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It is rather shocking isn't it? I would wager that this is not in your top ten favourite passages,
Because in our estimation, to our ears,
Jesus does not show his pastoral best here.
In response to disturbing news Jesus is anything BUT gentle Jesus meek and mild
But it is disturbing to see Jesus act this way because
News like worshipers massacred, their blood mingled with sacrifices, rings all to true for us,
It sounds rather like our news bites today, of violence,
atrocities committed by powerful people, making victims of people like us...who could be us.
We find it is easy to identify with the victims,
And with those who brought the story to Jesus looking for an explanation,
Wanting to believe that there was a reason for the event to happen to “those people”
So that we need not fear that such things could happen to us....
We want to be able to hold on to the gospel of success, to the thought that if we believe the right things,
Live the right way, such things will not happen to us.
In that way we are not much different from those disciples we read about this morning.
At the very least, they wanted Jesus to condemn the perpetrators, Pilate, AND all oppressors.
But Jesus doesn't....He refuses to be distracted even by that news.....
Pointing instead to the disciples own attitudes, that needed changing.
Below the surface of their question was the commonly held belief
That if you live well then God will bless your life, keep you from such tragedies.
So those people killed must have done something to deserve what happened to them....
Jesus would have none of it...even adding to their distress to make his point.
Affirming their belief about God...that God is a God of judgement
But challenging them to see the truth about themselves
that every person deserves judgment, every one of them every one of us.....
And that instead of pointing at others looking for faults, each of them and all of them
Needed to look inside themselves and their communities and repent of their wrong doing.
And Jesus reiterates the message referring to another news story of the day.
Of 18 killed when the Siloam Tower fell....
With both examples, Jesus levelled the playing field,
There were no insiders or outsiders, no one more deserving God's judgement than another.
No one more deserving of disastrous events than others....no one more deserving of God's love.
In effect Jesus said, Don't judge others on the basis of what happens to them
Don't be content with being less bad than others, instead focus on what God desires of you,
turn from what keeps you from living God's way and seeing others as God's children.
I wonder what those disciples thought of this message of Jesus at the time...
I wonder how many turned from following Christ that day.
It seems so harsh, so unfeeling, using a phrase from my past, It seems like Jesus didn't “give a fig”.....
To our sensibilities it seems like the wrong attitude, the wrong message
Wrong if you want to grow a congregation

Wrong if you want to comfort people in the wake of a tragedy,
Wrong if you want to help people to trust that God's love is for them, Jesus sacrifice for them....
Wrong for a celebration Sunday...

Unless Jesus meant what he said, and we do need to change, to see our need for change,
Unless it opens us to hear and understand the parable of the fig tree as it points to God's grace.
At least it should have been the parable of a fig tree, but since it didn't give even one fig,
it was more of a weed, taking up space and nutrients, so the practical owner wanted it cut down.
But the gardener saw something different and volunteered to tend it specially,
hands dirty, working manure into the roots, in what must have seemed a hopeless cause,
Giving time for the tree to respond....first, before giving up on it....
Although we call it the parable of the fig tree, it was really about the gardener
Pointing us beyond trees and gardeners to our lives and God's grace.

God tends people like fig trees so that we will bear fruit, God sees hope in the most hopeless causes.
God not only watches those who believe "right" act "right" but also those who don't
It points us to the truth that just as we all need repentance, God's love is for all
Every one of us needs God's working at our roots from time to time, over and over, every day
And God is willing to do that for us, for each of us, for every one of us.

With the parable, Jesus brings the difficult news stories into the light of God's grace,
And points to the truth about discipleship. Discipleship is not a fair weather pursuit.
Discipleship is about following God in the midst of life in all of life, not just when things are good.
The truth is difficult times and events should not distract us from bearing fruit in our lives.
It was the right message for the disciples as they learned to share the gospel with friends and enemies.
It was the right news for the apostles who could have been paralyzed by Jesus death
and for the early church under persecution,
Through their witness, their continuing to bear fruit for God, they have passed on faith to us.
it seems like the right message for today, for us as individuals and as a congregation.
There is no denying it, the past couple of years have been difficult,
Like fig trees, it is not enough just to survive—to be content with all leaf and no fruit
Thanks be to God, instead of hunkering down, by God's grace
We have continued to seek what God intends for our lives and our community and to work toward it
We are disciples with a mission, many questions remain unanswered
What we do know is that our future is in God's hands
Our task is to follow without having all the answers, even when it is difficult
To trust Christ will continue digging around our roots, preparing us for amazing things yet to come
Today we celebrate our past, dedicate our present,
and take steps to work toward the future God has in store for each of us, for our families,
The fruit may look like supporting the homeless in projects like the Claire building,
listening, bringing casseroles, visiting the sick, caring for children or walking together to raise money
for others. Our fruit may look like walking together in grief, building houses, partnerships
Ministry south of Fish Creek,
In good times and difficult, together and individually, may we share in word and action.
And all glory be to the One who loved us enough to die for us, with us now and forever, Amen