

“Turning Points”
Sermon delivered 3-7-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

Luke 13:1-9

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.'"

MORE TO LIFE

In our heart of hearts, I suspect most of you have a desire for your lives to be more than it is at the present moment. This is just a suspicion, with no evidence. Some of you may have resigned yourself to saying this is the way my life is and nothing is going to change. Some of you may be on guard against any kind of change that may rock the boat of your life. Your life is shaped by habits, the way you have always done things, a routine, a pattern. For things to be different, even if you desire them to be different, can be uncomfortable, and a challenge, even in the heart of hearts you want your life to be more creative, productive, and with a sense of meaning and purpose as opposed to being a cork in the ocean - just drifting...

WHAT DID I DO?

So, we turn to the Word of God this morning, instead of turning to the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with the animal blood for the sacrifice. I doubt that any of you sitting here this morning hold the belief with Pat Robertson that the people of Haiti or Chile deserved what happened to them. But when things go south in our own lives, we may pause and wonder, "What did I do to deserve this?" Most responses begin with the emotional. Can you imagine the Lord saying to you, (the Greek translation of the word "you" is like the southern you/all, meaning all of us) do you think the folks in Chile and Haiti are worse offenders than the other folks? "No, but I tell you repent, you will perish just as they did."

REPENTANCE

Ouch! The word "repent/repentant" doesn't seem to exist on many of our spell checkers today. Most of you would probably conclude there is nothing to repent

of in your life because you haven't done anything wrong, especially compared to those folks on the evening news... would you agree with this? I suspect you would. We have a resistance to seeing our shortcomings, our faults, and our defects. We are defensive when the prophet Nathan's of our lives show up for a moment of truth telling. Can we, or do we, want to change when we agree with what others may be saying about us? Do you need to change? We may say "Well, as the old hymn goes "Just as I am." Then... what about the grace of God? Am I not enough? We may say to ourselves, Compared to others, I am doing pretty well.

THE FUTURE

The notion of repentance for many is a picture of looking back, trying really hard because of our defense and blindness to find some things we have done wrong, bring them to God, let God know how bad we feel, ask for forgiveness, then check that off the list. This fits the bill for confession, but not for repentance. Confessing is about looking back and all the baggage we are carrying about what we have done. Repentance is about turning to the future to see what God is doing, and going to do, in your life.

BEARING FRUIT

Let us re-examine the notion of "repentance" through the eyes of the parable. The fig tree, representing Israel, has been in the vineyard for 7 years. One could not take fruit from it for the first three because under the law the fruit would have been considered unclean, the fourth year would have been the first fruit given to God, so for 3 years the owner has been coming looking for fruit on the fig tree. Finding none, he says "Cut it down!" If we look at what Jesus is saying about "repentance" through the eyes of this parable then it is not about what the tree has DONE but what the tree hasn't DONE. Hmmmmm, what does this say about your life and my life? The purpose of our lives is to bear fruit.

STOP!

Hopefully, we can agree confession is about what we have done and repentance is about the future. But confession without change becomes a game. If nothing changes we are playing with God, and fooling ourselves. How can we make an application of this to our lives tomorrow morning? What difference does it make in what you are hearing Jesus say this morning? I suspect that you may hear Jesus saying if you don't bear fruit you will (perish). This seems to be the logic of the Gospel this morning. We don't want to perish, so tomorrow we are going to go out and try harder... Stop!

TURNING TO GOD

Stop!!! This is more than about you getting your life together, being more productive, or a "worthy" or "perish" situation. Richard Jensen, in *Preaching Luke's Gospel* writes, "Repentance is not a fruit problem, it is a root problem. It is the root of who we are that a problem in God's eyes. So, Repentance cannot be composed of "I can" statements. "I have sinned God. I am sorry God. I will do

better God.” No, we have gone around and around in circles... repentance is recognizing we can't do better, and turning to God.

DOING NOTHING

Look at the parable... what has the tree done? Nothing. What is the tree doing to bear more fruit? Standing there. So, it is not about us jumping higher, running faster, or doing more, but about turning to God. Christ is the one putting the dung around the tree. Christ is the power of God in your life producing the fruit. Repentance is more about turning to God than turning from sin. Turning to God.

MERCY

Worship, without pointing to the fruit-bearing power of God in your life, is useless. Without this power our lives are lived as if we are cut down. My friend Debra said to me this week “I don't like those warm fuzzy sermons, making me feel good all over. I prefer to hear God's word challenging my life.” Well Debra, the Gospel this morning might be heard as judgment, but it is a parable of mercy. Threats rarely work, and when they do, it is only for the short term. Repentance is more like an “ah-ha moment”, as we are looking over the meaning and purpose of our lives, an ah-ha moment like the prodigal son waking up in the pig pen and considering how life can be different for him. It is an ah-ha moment when we are sick and tired of having a heart of stone, indifference to others, arrogance, and anything refusing to recognizing the divine presence in another.

MORE TIME

Carl Jung contends most of the problems we face in the second half of life are more spiritual than psychological (Modern man is search of a soul). God, producing the fruit Jesus is talking about in this story, can transform the roots of our lives. Jesus is the Gardner, the one who puts the dung around our trees, doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. Jesus is the one who says, “Give me more time.”

LET GOD HELP

Stop! Stop trying to get your act together on your own. Let this be the year you turn, you look not on your sins, but on the power of God at work in your life, transforming your life. Did the dung work on the fig tree? Jesus leaves the question open-ended like many of his parables. Only God can finish this parable in your life.