

Sunday Lesson – Feb 28, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 13: 1-9; 31-35

Lament over Jerusalem

Background

“This group of onlookers asks Jesus’ help in sorting out the age-old question of how to understand human suffering. Is it punishment for wrongs committed (13:2)? The subtext of such questions always comes back to the person asking them, and it carries two purposes. First, please reassure us that we are not as “bad” as those who suffered. *They* deserved what they got, but *we* don’t, right? The second and related agenda is for Jesus to tell us what we need to do to be sure we don’t suffer this way.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/tower-in-siloam/commentary-on-luke-131-9-31-35)*

Insight

“God’s purpose is to cultivate his tree so that the world may taste the fruit of God’s love. Our core values are framed around the image of a fruit tree. **We Connect:** When a tree is surrounded by other kinds of trees and is cross pollinated and receives new things into itself, it is made stronger and more vibrant. We strive to welcome all people, no matter who they are, into our community, because we know that diversity will make us more vital. **We Grow:** We grow our roots deep into the scripture, into prayer, into the habits of spiritual formation so that we can be grounded in God’s love and truth. **We Equip:** We grow up into a strong body where children are nurtured in the ways of Jesus so that they can become young adults who are confirmed in their faith and equipped to be God’s faithful people in the world. We work on equipping strong relationships in families and friendships and give people the skills needed to do the ministry that God has called them to do. When we are a



strong body we can withstand the winds that blow against us. We may bend, but we won't break. But what if we stopped there? What if we just focused on those three things? A fruit tree that is just about being a tree is missing the point. The tree does not exist for itself. The tree exists to bear fruit. When a fruit tree produces fruit two things happen. Other creatures are fed. And the seed is spread so that more trees can be planted and grow. God has planted us as a ministry. The fruit God calls us to bear is love. We are called to love each other, to love our neighbors, and to love our enemies. God has called us to be a place of shelter for the traveler and food for the hungry.” *(Excerpts from stevethomason.net/2013/03/03/wheres-the-fruit-a-sermon-on-luke-131-9-31-35-lent-2/)*

Gospel Reading

“About that time some people came up and told him about the Galileans Pilate had killed while they were at worship, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices on the altar. Jesus responded, “Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you, too, will die. And those eighteen in Jerusalem the other day, the ones crushed and killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed and fell on them, do you think they were worse citizens than all other Jerusalemites? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you, too, will die.” Then he told them a story: “A man had an apple tree planted in his front yard. He came to it expecting to find apples, but there weren't any. He said to his gardener, ‘What’s going on here? For three years now I’ve come to this tree expecting apples and not one apple have I found. Chop it down! Why waste good ground with it any longer?’ “The gardener said, ‘Let’s give it another year. I’ll dig around it and fertilize, and maybe it will produce next year; if it doesn’t, then chop it down.’” Just then some Pharisees came up and said, “Run for your life! Herod’s got your number. He’s out to kill you!” Jesus said, “Tell that fox that I’ve no time for him right now.

Today and tomorrow I'm busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick; the third day I'm wrapping things up. Besides, it's not proper for a prophet to come to a bad end outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets, abuser of the messengers of God! How often I've longed to gather your children, gather your children like a hen, Her brood safe under her wings—but you refused and turned away! And now it's too late: You won't see me again until the day you say, 'Blessed is he comes in the name of God.'" *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

"Jesus' framing, use, and interpretation of the parable of the barren fig tree is harsh. He is calling Jerusalem to repent, but a people or a nation must admit and be conscious of its wrongdoing in order to change its commitments, policies, and practices.

This passage is also difficult because Jesus doesn't call out Pilate for his cruelties. But Jerusalem will meet a fate similar to the Galileans and the eighteen unless they repent. Of what must they repent? Why does Jesus not condemn the violence of the state? Why is it that Jesus appears to characterize all of Jerusalem as sinful? Jesus' words of condemnation seem to condone the state violence and oppose resistance to oppressive state power. But is that really the case?

Jesus clarifies his point with a parable. A landowner, perhaps representing God, planted a fig tree in his vineyard. The vineyard and fig tree are common metaphors for Israel (Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1).

Trees that don't produce edible, nourishing fruit are useless; why else does one plant a fruit tree except for good fruit? Jerusalem's leaders who are expected to act and speak for the collective have not produced good fruit; they have not shown themselves to be righteous or just. It is easier to point out how others have committed violence against us than to accept and

condemn the violence we commit against each other through structural and systemic violence and corrupt leaders. Eventually, the entire vineyard will suffer and persons who count on us producing good fruit will suffer, our global neighbors.

God anointed Jerusalem and its leaders to be good and just towards its citizens and neighbors, to embody and be bearers of good news—a living wage, affordable livable housing, the incarcerated are rehabilitated and freed, the blind and otherwise dis-eased have access to quality affordable healthcare and clean water and sanitation, and all forms of oppression are eliminated (4:16-19). As the US Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman challenged us on Inauguration Day 2021, we must both see the light and muster the courage to be the light. Otherwise, we are good for nothing good." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Mitzi J. Smith*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Isaiah 55: 6-7/John 9: 1-5/2 Peter 3: 8-9](#) *God is patient-Look what God can do*
- [Galatians 5: 22-23](#) *Fruit of the Spirit*

Thought for the Day

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." ~ *Psalms 1: 2-3*

A Prayer

Holy One of mighty power, your word is powerfully dangerous. Your word casts out demons. Your word heals incurable diseases. Your word devours empires. Your word transforms the fabric of the universe. Help us to stand in awe and fear of what your word is capable of doing. Give us courage to speak your word and wisdom to hear it, for the sake of the one whose very whisper can demolish sin, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**