

March 24, 2019
Third Sunday In Lent
Giving Up Distractions : Bad Theology
and The Yearning To Belong

Ancient Reading ~ *Luke 13:1-9*

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their own sacrifices. Jesus replied, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed by a falling tower in Siloam — do you think they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Jesus told this parable: "There was a fig tree growing in a vineyard; the owner came out looking for fruit on it and didn't find any. The owner said to the gardener, 'Look here! For three years now I have come out in search of fruit on this fig tree and have found none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' In reply, the gardener said, 'Please leave it one more year while I hoe around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Second Reading ~ *adapted from Father Richard Rohr in "A Toxic Image of God"*

Much of Christian history has manifested a very different god than the one Jesus revealed and represented. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, but this "god of our culture" surely doesn't. Jesus tells us to forgive "seventy times seven" times, but this "god of our culture" doesn't. Instead, that god burns people for all eternity. Many of us were raised to believe that. As a result, we've developed an unworkable and toxic image of God that a healthy person would never trust. The mystical, transformative journey cannot take place until that image is undone. Why would you want to spend any time... even one hour in silence, solitude, or intimacy with such a god?

Third Reading ~ *adapted from "Creative Transformation" in Living The Questions*

In the short-term, simply "belonging" often fulfills the need for which people are yearning. Otherwise thoughtful people tolerate remarkably bad theology and shallow spirituality because the belonging system itself is perceived as having more value than what the belonging system stands for or practices. People keep

paying their dues to the dating service that not only doesn't connect them with their true love, but actively works against revealing just how much love and grace is available to them. Women serve faithfully in churches that deny their authority to be in leadership. Parents and friends of Gays, Lesbians, Trans, and Gender Non-Binary folk silently tolerate hate speech from the pulpit that condemns their children. Progressively minded individuals endure clichéd prayers and liturgies that shore up spiritual ideas that they have long since abandoned. While the criteria for choosing a faith community rarely include "a catalyst for personal and societal transformation," such criteria are precisely what are needed.