

Repent or Perish
March 7, 2010
Luke 13:1 – 9

Our scripture reading today come from the 13th Chapter of Luke's gospel, verses 1 through 13. Please listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

¹Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

⁶Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

⁸" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

During the Season of Lent we have had an opportunity to talk about repentance, self-awareness and most importantly, self reflection; the kind of reflection that forces each of us to look deep within ourselves and take a look at our own calling as the children of God, to seek the path that God has laid out before each of us and to ponder some of the most inspiring lessons given to the disciples along their exodus to the city of Jerusalem. The Season of Lent has offered us the privilege of journeying with Christ as he continues his path to the city of his eventual death and as he and his disciples make their way to the very hub of Jewish Heritage, we are given an insider's glimpse at the Master's Plan unfolding; a plan to reconcile relationship between mankind and their Creator.

All of this began with Christ's preparation for his ministry as he fasted in the desert. In depriving himself of the pleasures and luxuries of his modern world, Jesus was able to focus on the work that lay before him. However, it was during this time that Satan took advantage of Jesus' hunger and human weakness. Satan began to tempt Jesus with a quick fix to his needs; turning stones into bread or accepting a position of fame and glory in the eyes of the Kingdoms of the World. We learned an important lesson about the power of God's Spirit and God's Word in our lives and so Satan left Jesus until a more opportune time.

Last Sunday we saw a revelation of that more opportune time as we the Pharisees came and warned Jesus about the plans of Herod and his men to do away with Jesus. The kind of "doing away with" that you see in mobster movies where people are stuffed into a drunk, taken away in the middle of the night never to be seen or heard from again. Jesus spoke again with authority and compassion as he both told the Pharisees to tell Herod that he would continue to carry out the ministry and call of God and then showed true heartache in the knowledge that Israel had rejected God's plan time and time again.

This week, we are again given insight into God’s plan for mankind and especially for each of us. Our reading offers us a twofold awareness; the first being found in verses 1 – 5 which simply state for each of us that no one is considered more or less in favor with God than anyone else around us. “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

I told you the story last week of the hardware salesman who felt it necessary to educate me on the finer details of modern conservative theology; that is, “Sin is Sin,” he explained. I’ve thought a lot about that over the past week and today’s reading reinforces only serves to reinforce what I have come to realize . . . he’s right – sin is sin! Now let me take it to a little higher level for you because I don’t know that what he was trying to communicate is exactly what I have come to appreciate from his words. The salesman’s words were judgmental, condemning and marginalizing. He intended to keep the margins of society well marginalized in his statement, all while equating his disapproval for what he doesn’t understand as sin.

Here is where I began to pray and seek the God for direction. You see, in our reaction to the ongoing need to lessen the margin between our community and the conservative majority, I believe that we have begun to justify ourselves to the extent of downplaying the sin in our lives. We act as if all the fundamental teachings of sin must be wrong simply because we innately believe and have come to know that their doctrinal beliefs concerning homosexuality are wrong.

Today’s reading, however, very clearly states that *sin is sin*. “Unless you repent,” Jesus says, “you too will all perish.” The truth here is this, it doesn’t matter if you are gay, straight,

black, white, male, female, Jew or Gentile . . . *sin is sin* and separation from God is separation from God. Unless you are in reconciled relationship with your God and your Creator, you are outside of the will of God. This has little to do with who you are, who you work for, how much education you have and most certainly nothing to do with who you love. It does, however, have everything to do with God, God's call to reconciliation and the path that God has laid out for each and every one of mankind; not just the men, not just the straight, not just upper middle class white Americans, but all of mankind. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28).

Please do not confuse your need to reject conservative fundamentalist views with the need to reject basic Christian doctrine and teachings. God wants to be in relationship with you all and in allowing God to guide and teach us, we are far better equipped to deal with the world, to stand with power and authority against the temptations and lies of the enemy and most importantly in recognizing worth in those around us. This brings us to the second part of our reading today.

Verses 6 through 9 tell us of a farmer's plan to rid his garden of a particularly fig tree; one that has failed to prove itself by being productive and fruitful. 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' Society tends to look at our community and fails to see any worth within it. And why shouldn't they? The marginalized of our world today are so tired of being cast aside and in trying to be seen we are sometimes overzealous in our approach. The fact is we tend to embrace our differences to the point of becoming self absorbed with our need to be seen rather than our need to belong or to be accepted. Instead of working towards a solution to the problems created by modern culture we tend to make things worse by rejecting those who reject us and in doing so

we create an elitist attitude that leads us to foster animosity not only amongst ourselves and those who reject us but also with those closest to us. That reacting to rejection we build up walls that not only protect from those who have hurt us but also keep us from reaching out to those who are in the most need of our love, encouragement and support.

The farmer in our reading today was ready to cast aside the fig tree because he had seen nothing productive from it in three year's time. But the caretaker took a different approach, rather than just casting the tree aside, he begged the owner of the vineyard to give him a chance to nurture the tree before giving up on it. We, like the farmer, are so quick to give up on those closest and not so close to us. Here at New Day we have coveted with one another to love and encourage one another and yet continuously there are those of us who choose to talk about others, dismiss others ideas and give up on peoples talents because we have failed to see any fruit. Instead of chopping people down, let's begin to do as we have promised one another and that is to nurture, encourage and love one another. Has this phrase become just another set of words for us or do we truly believe that we can be a part of God's Kingdom breaking forth. How can we ever expect to reconcile with our Creator if we cannot reconcile with one another and most importantly if we cannot reconcile with ourselves.

Today's reading teaching us first and foremost that we are all sinners, we are all called to account my our Creator and if we do not repent then we will perish – we will perish in this mortal world and we will certainly perish in the eternal world to follow. As we sing our sermon hymn today, *We Delight*, please know that suffering and perishing is not God's desire for any of you. Through repentance – the simple acceptance of God's love, guidance and direction or our lives – we can delight in the law of God's Word and we can delight in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus who died not for the fulfillment of prophesy but rather for the fulfillment of God's plan and

desire to reconcile with creation. The altar is open this morning if you would like time to reflect and pray. Won't you come? Amen.