

Figs

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year C – Luke 13:1-9

preached by the Rector at Trinity, Columbus, March 7, 2010

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, March 3, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

As I've been saying the last couple of weeks, one of the purposes of Lent, one of the tasks to which we are called in these forty days leading to our remembrance of our Lord's Passion, death and Resurrection, is for us to take the time, and make the space, to look at our lives, to look at our relationships, to really look at our *selves*, to shore up those areas we have neglected, and to turn away from the sin that keeps us from being more fully who we were meant to be. But even if we are genuinely committed to doing all this introspection, are we sure we know what we're looking for?

That's the sort of thing that confused some of the folks hanging out with Jesus in this morning's portion of the Gospel. "Those Galileans," they said to the young rabbi, "they must have been *real* bad sinners, real *evildoers* for God to have cut them down with the sword of the governor's guard." "Or what about those folks who lived out near the city gate? They *must* have been under God's wrathful judgment, to have had that tower fall on them, for Pete's sake, smushing them in their sleep."

After all he had been saying for, like *three* years, after countless sermons and sayings on God's grace, after miracles and wonders and signs of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, I can just imagine Jesus shaking his head, maybe even planting his face in his hands. "You're *still* not getting it," he told them. "It isn't about somebody else's sin," he said, "it's about what you're doing... about *yours*."

You see, the world we live in is *not* the world that God created. Scripture tells us that in the beginning, when God called something, *everything* out of the nothing, he looked at it and he pronounced it "good." From darkness, he called light. From chaos, he brought order. From mere dust he spoke life and breathed into the human heart the image of his *own being*.

But whether or not you believe Genesis to be literal fact, whether or not you believe *anything* about Scripture, you and I have to admit that the goodness that God created, is *not* the world in which we live. This world in which terrorists plot destruction on the other side of the world, where madmen kill babies in their classroom, where drug dealers dispense death right around the corner, this world was not shaped by God's hands, but by human sin. Whether or not you accept the story of the "fall" as literal fact, it's easy to see that through *our* hatreds and *our* prejudices, through *our* pride and *our* selfishness, through *our* paltry thievings and *our* loose ways with what we know to be the truth, through *our* failure to love each other as we ourselves have been loved, day by day, moment by moment, *we* – never mind Adam and Eve – you and I *we* have twisted the goodness of creation into a brokenness that is *not* what God had in mind, a brokenness that is *not* what he wants for us.

We are called, especially in this Lenten journey, but *every* day, to examine *ourselves*, to look inside to find how we have, by thought, word and deed turned away from God and away from one another. But all too often, like those folks hanging out with Jesus that day, we'd rather look at *other* people's short comings, at *other* people's failings, at all those *other* sinner's sins. "Why doesn't God *do* something about those sinners, anyway?" we say. "Why doesn't the almighty, all-powerful ruler of creation just make it stop?"

I've got to tell you, the God I find in Scriptures is *not* some sort of puppet-master. He is the Lord who defines himself as the woman searching for even the tiniest fragment of what belongs to her. He is the Christ who calls himself the shepherd, who leaves all he has, to come chasing after the one sheep that is constantly straying away. He is the infinite and omnipotent God who became incredibly vulnerable and precisely finite, who lived for us, and who died for us, and who rose for us, because he loves each and every one of us too much to cause our pain. He loves us too much to contribute to our suffering. He loves us too much to twist our lives or use our sorrow to *manipulate* us into more righteous behavior. And he

wants *our* love too much, to steal from us our *freedom* to love, or to turn our backs on him, as we turn a careless shoulder to one another.

And what's true for you, is true for me. And it's true for those Galileans. And it's true for the ones wielding the swords. And it's true for those swinging machetes, those shouldering AK-47s or AR-15s, those building IED's. And it's true for those of us whose thoughts and words and deeds have established or perpetuated a world that coerces and manipulates and oppresses.

What's true for you, is true for me. And it's true for those crushed beneath the Siloam tower. And it's true for those who built that tower. And it's true for the killed and the maimed and the homeless of Aleppo and Lagos and Kabul, and wherever else the root of *our* neglect, and *our* indifference, and our *sin* have built so great a chasm between us and them, between the haves and the have-nots.

"Unless you repent," Jesus told those folks hanging out with him that day, "unless *you* repent, unless *you* turn around, unless *you* move toward the command to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, unless you move toward loving your neighbor as much as you love yourself, you will *all* perish."

It seems there was a man who planted a fig tree in the middle of his vineyard. There in the most productive part of his winemaking enterprise, he planted a tree to produce fruit for no other reason but his own joy. For two years he came to the garden, in hopes of enjoying the sweetness of the fruit, but found nothing. When he came a third time, he said, perhaps enough is enough. Why should a tree that isn't doing what it was created for keep taking up space that could be better used. "Cut it down," he told the gardener, "let's just try something else."

"Instead," said the gardener, "let's give it a while longer, maybe one more season." "Let's dig around it, let's give it what it needs." "Maybe, *maybe* it will grow the fruit it was created to grow."

Sometimes in Lent, it gets a little uncomfortable having the soil around our roots poked and prodded and dug at. Sometimes in Lent, it gets a little overwhelming with all that extra fertilizer heaped around. Sometimes in Lent, it gets a little challenging taking a good look around to see if we are actually producing the kind of fruit expected by the one who created us for no other reason than love. Sometimes in Lent, it gets a little uncomfortable, a little overwhelming, a little challenging.

And you know, sometimes in Lent, perhaps it's *supposed* be that way.