

3 Lent Year C March 23 2025

Give Jesus your manure

Luke 13:1-9

I am like most people when I was growing up, I didn't like it when I got in trouble when I got caught. My go to in these situations was to say that life is not fair, or I would attempt to blame someone or something as a way to avoid my part in the offense. My Mom and Dad were skilled at making those lessons teachable. My parents made it clear, there are consequences for my actions. Trust me, I didn't like the lesson, but I do appreciate the loving intention on my parents' behalf to teach me that I can make different choices. They taught me to grow from my experiences so that I can become a better person. The emotional pain of facing my own responsibility in my life was a worthy price for the freedom that comes with integrity. I still work on owning my own actions in my life, it never gets any easier, but the peace of being honest with God and others is well worth the effort.

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus is approached by scribes and the Pharisees. The conversation referenced two tragic events in which Galileans had died. The first event that was talked about referenced the death of a group of fellow Galileans during a religious event. Pilate was well known for brutal reprisals and disdain for local religious practices. The implied question from the scribes and the Pharisees was that clearly the people who died was doing something wrong. It was God who was angry at them and therefore allowed them to be killed. Jesus didn't agree with what was being said. He said, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." Jesus made it clear, that trying to determine for others what is a greater sin is an act of futility. However, Jesus did imply there will be a reckoning and there is no avoiding this reality.

Jesus told a story about how an owner was watching a fig tree grow in his garden. For three years the fig tree failed to produce fruit. In an instant the owner decided to remove the tree because it was taking up space and wasting the soil. It was the gardener who became the advocate for the tree. "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." I believe the point is this story was that Jesus believes in giving people chances to make corrections, but there will come to a point in which fruit must be produced or there will be negative outcomes.

As Jesus was moving toward Jerusalem, he was making it clear that there will be a reckoning for the choices and behaviors that people make. Jesus was giving a warning that although it may not be clear immediately, avoiding responsibility for one's poor action will come to an end. There will come a point that everyone will provide an account of what they have done or didn't do. **However,** there is still time to make changes and offer amends for past grievous before it is too late.

On April 20, 2010, an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico which recently has been renamed Gulf of America. The explosion, which killed 11 men, caused the rig to sink and started a catastrophic oil leak from the well. I saw a cartoon that showed three men representing British Petroleum, Transocean (the owner of the oil rig), and Halliburton pointing at each other as to explain that they were not responsible for what happened. The companies were following the legal advice to place the blame elsewhere to avoid large fines. Who was the worst sinner?

Rather than each company owning their part in this tragic event and to seek a way to right what had been wronged, they worked hard to make the other two to be the greater offenders. In my opinion, what was a lost opportunity to correct the wrong. **Or was it?** Perhaps there was spreading of manure in the soil of that tragedy that brought about good fruit. During my visit to Corpus in 2022 I was informed that funds that were collected from the Deepwater Horizon event were used to establish a research facility to develop methods to clean up major oil spills in the future. God still can take horrible situations and make them into a blessing.

Here we are three weeks into the season of Lent. How are we to incorporate today's Gospel story into our lives today? I like what our recently retired Presiding Bishop Michale Curry, who has a passion for mission for Jesus, has to offer for us to consider today.

(quote) .... there is (also) a missional moment and message here. For after Jesus says no, he goes on to speak of the responsibilities of those who hear his words.

"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"

After applying this understanding to another tragic situation, Jesus tells a parable about a gardener determined to tend a fruitless fig tree because he is open to a future possibility THAT HE DOES NOT CONTROL OR MANAGE.

Facing the reality of mystery and the limits of what we can know is not an excuse to stand still and look sad, as Luke describes some of the disciples, paralyzed at the time of the death of Jesus.

Jesus is on a mission.

Those who would be disciples of Jesus, who would follow in his way in the power of his Spirit, are on THAT MISSION.

Much is unknown. Many questions will remain unanswered. In the end, the future is God's, but we share in the mission of the unfolding the future. That is clearly where our responsibility lies.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19). [A shameless plug for this upcoming coming Chosen episode for our Lenten Soup and Study]

I (**Michel Curry**) once heard the late Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, president of Morehouse College, say that "faith is taking your best step, and leaving the rest to God". The missional side of this Gospel reading may be that those who would follow in the footsteps of Jesus are charged with witnessing to the world in the name of spirit of Jesus. The results of this witness ARE NOT OURS TO KNOW.

The working out of God's kingdom is **NOT OURS TO FIGURE OUT. OUR TASK** is to labor, **WITHOUT HAVING ALL THE ANSWERS**, to acknowledge the deep mystery of it all.

The task of the disciple is to witness and then wait, to take our best step **AND LEAVE THE REST TO GOD.**

We labor now for a future that WE ARE NOT MEANT TO CONTROL.

Did not Jesus teach us to pray, not "My Kingdom come, THY will be done?"

**(End of Quote)**

The growing sense of apathy is perhaps a greater threat to our wellbeing than our growing tolerance of the current state of chaos and acceptance of poor public leadership. However, I am encouraged by what Bishop Curry has to say.

### **We are on a mission with Jesus.**

We are not hopeless in our efforts to live in a world that seems to be hopeless in dealing with injustice.

We place our trust in God's ultimate plan will prevail so that we can do our part in making the world a better place. We don't have to become passive in the face of injustice or become cynical in our lives.

However, we **DO** need to do our part in the healing and reconciliation process for our society to heal. This is the fruit that will save our lives.

Not all of us are called to lead large movements of healing and reconciliation, **but we are all given responsibility to follow Jesus in this effort.** We all have do our part in nurturing the soil of our souls to bear the fruits that God is seeking to product in our world, the fruits of love, hope and joy. So, take the manure of life, the stinky, embarrassing, and ugly parts of our lives and till it into the soil. It may be that very manure that produces what we have been wanting to come alive our love and hope in one another and with God.

In some cases, we need time for the fruit of God's promise to grow, in other cases the fruit is produced immediately.

In all cases where fruit is never produced God will address it.

Lent is a season for all of us to take responsibility for the actions that didn't bear worthy fruit.

We have a gardener who is advocating for us and giving us another opportunity to amend our ways and to bear the fruit of love, mercy, and compassion.

But there will come a time **if** we don't take action to change our ways

we face the real possibility that our tree will be cut down.