

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: On my bed I remember you; I think of you
through the watches of the night.

**All: Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow
of your wings.**

Minister: I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

MP 396 Just as I am

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The Psalmist says: "The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to anger, and full of constant love." Let us pray:

Almighty God, who sees the secret places of our hearts,
discerns our thoughts and intentions,
and from whom nothing in all creation is hidden,
draw us to your throne of grace,
that we may receive mercy by your Son our great High Priest,
and be strengthened by your Spirit in our inner being;
We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 13:1-9 (NT page 1046)

13 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But

unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ 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? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

6 Then 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. ⁷ So 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. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

Reader: Carol Coull

Background to the reading

According to our reading “some” people came to Jesus and told him of the Galileans who were killed by Pilate when they were slaughtering their sacrifices. Researchers are generally of the opinion that these “people” were the Pharisees because they thought that tragedies were a punishment of God over those who sinned. They were actually singling out the Galileans because it is a known fact that most Jews did not had a high regard for them as they lived near the borders with the Gentiles.

Jesus is now making the point that all people are sinners and if people do not repent, they will face the same fate. You cannot judge some to more guilty of sin than others. To illustrate his point Jesus referred to the tragedy that happened in Jerusalem when the “tower in Siloam” collapsed and killed 18 people. Natural tragedies and incidents that happens to people are not an indication of the degree of their sinfulness. The “tower in Siloam” may have been on Jerusalem’s city wall above the pool of Siloam and it may have been associated with Pilate’s construction of an improved water-supply system for the city. They were definitely not more guilty of sin than the rest of the people in Jerusalem. They must all repent and follow Him.

Then Jesus tells another parable again to drive his point home.

It was custom in Palestine to plant fruit trees in the vineyards. Jesus’ parable is about a fig tree in a vineyard. The owner tried for three years to

find fruit in the fig tree and decided to get rid of it. But the vineyard worker asks the master to wait till the fourth year to make sure it was a worthless tree.

The vineyard worker answers to the owner, perhaps as his servant, yet intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. Digging around a tree and putting manure around it to fertilize it were common procedures, but fig trees usually did not need manure; the worker does all he can to try to save the tree. If it does not bear fruit in the coming year after additional care and treatment, it will then be cut down.

The fig-tree is used metaphorically for Israel in Hosea 9:10. Most probably Jesus was making the same reference.

So what does our reading mean?

The interpretation of the parable goes hand in hand with that of the preceding controversy story. It is best to interpret it as symbolizing a last opportunity for the nation of Israel to repent before becoming subject to divine judgment. God will judge the living and the dead and everyone will be judged the same way, whether Jerusalem Jews, or Galilean Jews or Gentiles! They must seize the opportunity to listen to Jesus and turn away from their sins.

MP 755

When I survey (Celtic tune)

Sermon

The text verses for the sermon are: 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.’”

Jesus was making a strong point that I think would have been very uncomfortable for the people who heard it the first time. Jesus was for certain not mincing His words! His message was clear and simple: they must stop worrying about other people’s lives and concentrate on their own spirituality. They must think of their own lives of faith, are they obedient to God and His word or the world because they cannot please both. If they choose against God, they will most certainly perish. If they choose God they will be like a fig tree bearing fruit.

I cannot help but think that Lent is the time where the Lord is spiritually fertilizing us, digging around us to help us to bear fruit. It is a time where we as fig trees should stand out and show the world the fruit that we are carrying, the fruit of the spirit according to Galatians chapter 5 which “ is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control.”

- Yes we should show them the love of God through what Jesus have done for us, love that will be able to forgive, love that is not holding book of any wrong, love that is unconditional.
- And we should have joy that God has saved us and is travelling with us again and again to the cross and beyond the cross to His everlasting Kingdom.
- We should have peace, knowing that nothing can separate us from the forgiveness and mercy of God.
- We should have the courage to struggle and suffer and get on with life because we know that God is present with us.
- We should be kind to everyone we meet.
- We should be faithful to the Lord in our following and make Him the first and last priority of our lives.
- We should be able to control our tempers because the Lord have forgiven us for so much more!

Lent is the time where we should make time for the Lord. I reminds me of a story I read on the internet about a father who did not have time to spend with his wee boy. I changed the story a wee bit to make it shorter. One day the boy went up to his father and asked him how much he earns per hour? The father was so annoyed and send him straight to his room. But after a while he felt bad and went to his room. He then told him that he gets about £ 20 an hour. The wee boy then asked him to borrow him £2. The father felt that he was getting angry again, thinking that the boy just asked him to get mehr money of him. But he bit on his tongue and just gave the boy the £ 2. The next afternoon as he came back from work, his wee boy was waiting for him. Without saying a word he handed his father £ 20, saying: Here is 20 pounds, I hope you can spend one hour with me tomorrow!

The Lord is giving us so much. Hopefully we can spend some time with our Heavenly father this Lent on our way to celebrating Easter!

Lent is a time where we prepare ourselves for Easter and what it means. We are the fig tree in the vineyard that has been spared by the grace and mercy of God. We have been planted by God with strong roots. He gives us nourishment and protection through His Holy Spirit. There is no reason why we cannot bear the fruit of His Holy Spirit.

But we cannot manage on our own. So let us ask God to help us to bear fruit. Let us pray:

Lord, make us like fruitful trees.

May we put down deep roots into you, grow strong and tall as good examples for you

and bear the fruit of your Holy Spirit for the benefit of others, and the advancement of your Kingdom on this earth according to your will , we ask this through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen