

Lent 3C.19; Ex 3:1-15; 1Cor 10:1-12; Luke 13:1-9; *It's about time*

Albert Einstein talked about TIME in this way

"Learn from yesterday. Live for today. Hope for tomorrow."

Those are wise words to live by in this Season of Lent.

What are we doing with our time?

A story is told that two old men had been best friends for years, and they both live to their early 90's, when one of them suddenly falls deathly ill. His friend comes to visit him on his deathbed, and they're reminiscing about their long friendship.

The friend says, *"Listen, when you die, do me a favor. I want to know if there's baseball in heaven."* The dying man responds, *"We've been friends for a lifetime, ... so yes, I'll do this for you."* And then he dies.

A few days later, the surviving friend is sleeping, when he hears his friend's voice. *"I've got some good news and some bad news,"* he says. *"The good news is:*

... there's baseball in heaven." *"What's the bad news?"*

"You're pitching on Wednesday." (Huff Post. Baseball in Heaven 2011/Dec 06, 2017)

Again, tomorrow is promised to no one.

Yet, take heart, we have a God who said to Moses, ***"I have witnessed the affliction of my people...have heard their cry... I know well what they are suffering."***

That God is personally involved with Israel. That is the God of Jesus.

That God sent Jesus to us for a reason

Enter some Pharisees who had no time for sinners. Many of them believed that sinners should just be written off. Jesus did not agree. And he told a parable about a barren fig tree. Everyone in his audience knew the prodigious potential of fig trees. A new plant should bear fruit in two years, and then can be harvested twice a year. **The plant that was unproductive for three years was a real slacker!**

But observe the contrast between the attitude of the vineyard owner and that of his gardener. The attitude of *the vineyard owner* was: chop the tree down; it's only taking up space. It's an attitude that seems eminently reasonable.

Why should an unproductive tree soak up scarce underground water?

Chopping the tree down was the logical option. That way he didn't have to invest any more time and resources into making it become fruitful.

The attitude of the gardener was very different.

Enter the gardener who says, **"Let me work on it, dig around it and give it some dung."** **Notice that the word for *dung*, Gk. *kopria*, shares some meaning with the word for *troubles* (Gk. *kopos*). Luke is saying that even through "troubles" God can shape the present. God is digging around and dunging in, through Jesus, for us.

2 *Jesus is the gardener, the tender of fruit trees. Better still. He was a lover of fruit trees. **He cared about this little tree. He had sacrificed himself for it.** That enhanced its value *in his eyes*. A thing becomes precious to us, not only because of ... what we get out of it, but also because of what we put into it.

The gardener knew about fig trees. He knew that it *can take a lot of careful tending for a particular tree to become fruitful*. If a fig tree was barren, he didn't give up.

He tried to help it, by enhancing the soil. The owner's way may have seemed sensible, *but it was the way of the head rather than of the heart*. It was the way of power rather than love. Power is only interested in results, and often wants them instantly. **Power has no patience with the slow, no sympathy for the weak.**

The gardener's way was **the way of love. Love is patient and Love is kind.** Love doesn't give up easily. Love doesn't force; it coaxes, encourages, and waits.

The way of Jesus, was and is, the way of love.

The Pharisees did nothing for sinners; Jesus gave everything for sinners. Sinners needed someone to take an interest *in them*, and to show them the way to something better. Many responded to his love with the result that their barren lives became fruitful.

The parable has been called ... "the parable of the second chance." Sometimes we are not willing to give people a second chance. We tend to be harsh on others until we need a *second chance* ourselves. The real message of this parable is that God is just as involved, just as caring, as in the time of Moses, ... and, even more so, because Jesus is the very hand of God ... *in the flesh*.

Yet, God does not and cannot force us to love.

Where's the hope? **Within the *Exodus* story, there is an unexpected element that has an echo in Luke's gospel. In *Exodus* we hear that Moses is told, "***The place where you stand is holy ground.***" In *Luke*, we read, "***I (Jesus) shall cultivate the ground.***" In Hebrew the word play is this, 'adam/'adama, *i.e., the human being/the ground* (the reference is from Gen 2:4-7, the 2nd Creation story). Now connect the dots.

Look around you & actively ... love, forgive, act for, share with and respect ... the Holy Ground, the people living all around you, today.

What are we doing with our time?

In our lives, we regret mostly what we did not do.

What are you and I putting off until tomorrow?

At this Lenten Liturgy of Time, Jesus is willing to work with us and give us the second chance that the gardener gave the fig tree, the chance to get it right, the chance to bear good fruit. Time is not endless. We have the power of the Present! **My friends, "Life, if lived well, is long enough."** - Seneca

(*New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies, F. McCarthy, **Celebration, Lent 3C.2019)