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3rd Sunday in Lent – Year C

Sunday, March 20, 2022

The Holy Gospel, according to Saint Luke, the 13th Chapter. Glory to you, oh Lord.

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Jesus asked them, do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?

No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did, or those 18 who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.

Then he told this parable.

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here. For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and still, I find none cut it down. Why should it be wasting the soil?"

He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I did around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our God, for you are our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, friends this past week, I found myself in the waiting room of the dentist's office.

As I waited for my appointment, I flipped through a magazine that I'm not familiar with.

It is called Mental Floss.

An article in that magazine caught my eye.

It talked about things we can do related to our daily schedule that make us happier and healthier.

Here were some suggestions from that article.

At 8:30 every morning we should decide something. Researchers have found that we make our best decisions right after we wake up. Later in the day, we tend to suffer from decision fatigue and make the quicker or easier decision.

At 10:00 AM we should take an aspirin mornings are the most common time for both heart attacks and migraines. A daily aspirin could ward off pain or even save your life.

2:00 PM is the right time for a power nap. Researchers have found that a 10 minute power nap is the best way to fight that midafternoon slump.

At 4:30 in the afternoon, we should clean our house. Late afternoon is when our hand eye coordination is at its highest.

At 5:00 PM we should get some exercise because you see our body temperature peaks at around 5, which increases our stamina and strength.

At 9:00 PM it says we should sell something on eBay because the best time to end an auction is around 9:00 o'clock.

10:00 PM is the time to face a tough problem. Oddly enough, people do their most abstract thinking when they are tired.

So at 10:00 PM your wandering mind might lead to a more creative solution than you would find at noon.

Well, the bottom line of this article was timing is everything.

Well friends, in our gospel lesson for today, we hear a unique story that only appears in the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus says that it is time for people to repent to avoid ending up like the murdered Galileans and the victims of the Saloam tower disaster.

He also says that it is time to be fruitful, unlike the fig tree that is not producing. So what is Jesus saying in this scripture lesson?

Well, it seems to me he's talking about two stories of brutality and bloodshed that occurred.

During the rule of Roman Emperor Pontius Pilate. You see Pilate dreamed of building an aqueduct to carry water from a rural spring to the city, Jerusalem, a distance of about 30 miles.

Now what the Jews of Galilee and Judea objected to was how Pilate funded the project by taking money from the temple Treasury. So Pilate sends his loot men into the crowds to kill the Jewish ringleaders.

Jesus goes on to speak of the 18 who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them.

This was probably the result of the same aqueduct project. The Tower on Jerusalem's city walls had collapsed, killing all of those who were standing near.

Now, of course, this story is really not about Roman cruelty or terrible civil engineering.

It is about the need to repent.

To turn one's life around. So, Jesus asks, do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans.

And were the 18 crushed by the tower worse offenders than all others living in Jerusalem?

No, of course not.

Says Jesus, he rejects the idea that those who died by Pilate's order were more sinful than others.

And he says that those who were killed by the freakish collapse of the tower did not deserve it either.

They were simply at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Timing is everything?

The point Jesus is making seems fairly obvious.

We all need to reflect along our faith journeys as to how things are in terms of our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

The word repent literally means to stop and to move in a different direction.

If we are speaking or acting in ways that are not consistent with the good news of the gospel, then it is time to correct our course.

Then Jesus goes on in this text to tell the story of the barren fig tree.

This parable begins with the owner of the vineyard visiting his fields to survey their fruitfulness.

He is justifiably upset at the fruitless condition he discovers, even after watching this one particular tree for three years. So he says to the gardener cut it down. Why is it wasting the soil?

But the gardener offers another possible solution. The gardener offers a word of grace.

The gardener suggests that the fig tree be given both the grace of more time and the goodness of a richer environment.

He says, Sir, "Let it alone for one more year until I dig around it. And put manure on it."

Once again timing is everything. One more year is requested to allow for greater fruitfulness.

Mercy is offered to allow the fig tree to repent to go in a new direction.

Well, friends in Christ we have now reached the third Sunday in Lent, a season in the church year that takes its name from the Old English word for spring.

Lent is the springtime of our souls a time for spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

And I would suggest to you that Lent affords us the opportunity to think about our timing and to ask the question, are we charting a course that will encourage and enable us to bear fruit?

During this time of year, I'm always curious to hear what some folks are giving up for Lent.

For many Christians find that making a sacrifice during this season can aid us in our repentance and lead us to spiritual growth.

And then we all know of other Christians who use this season of the year not to quit something or to give something up, but rather to add something like practicing greater fruitfulness, looking for new opportunities to reach out with the love of Christ, to those who are struggling around them.

Many will volunteer to provide food, clothing and transportation to their needy neighbors, trusting that they will encounter Jesus himself when they feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. And welcome the stranger.

And so friends in Christ, today's gospel text reminds us that timing is everything.

May we be encouraged during this season of Lent, his springtime of our souls to pause

And to think about the direction we are heading.

Is it time to recalculate?

For God gives us this season to till the soil.

And to add more manure.

And for that holy fertilizer we say.

Thanks be to God. Amen.