

God Only Is To Judge

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A people who have been emancipated, no longer in exile; released from a bondage endured for over 70 years. A new freedom, and now a prophet telling them to smarten up and turn back to God before it is too late...in other words: give up that Babylonian night life that you had been drawn into while you were in exile. Welcome Home but if you don't change your ways and repent then it will all be for not. Isaiah says: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live." He is talking about repentance, a theme that will be reiterated throughout Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, again and again and again.

During our Bible Study this week Laurel looked up the word "Repentance" and on Wikipedia and it states: "**Repentance** is reviewing one's actions and feeling contrition or regret for past wrongs, which *is accompanied by commitment to and actual actions that show and prove a change for the better*. In modern times, it is generally seen as involving a commitment to personal change and the resolve to live a more responsible and humane life. In other words, being sorry for one's misdeeds." Repentance is not just saying yes, I will change but it involves true action. We will revisit this theme as we look at our Gospel lesson.

Here we have individuals who have been offering sacrifices to God, devout persons and yet they were killed while offering these sacrifices. The old question arises: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In 1981, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner wrote a book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" after his three-year-old son was diagnosed with a degenerative disease that meant the boy would only live until his early teens. We often ask God not only this question but also "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

Jesus redirects this tragic event away from the event itself toward the salvation of those who died. In the eyes of Jesus one perishes when not being at one with God. He boldly confronts those present in his statement: "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Talk about your Hell, Fire, and Brimstone Sermons.

The operative word is CHANGE, change from what you are doing, turn yourself around, quit comparing yourself with others, stop looking at society for your answers. It is not your spouse, your family, your friends, your boss, society who will be judging you in the end, it is God! It would be easier if it were all of the other factions in our lives who were judging because then we would know exactly how to change because there examples out there, but it is a little more difficult when we realize it is God doing the judging.

But wait a minute, don't we just have to intend to be good? One of my grandmother's favorite expressions was: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions"; I take that to mean that good intentions are meaningless unless followed through. In today's service I hope that you noticed that there was a Confessional Prayer, A Moment of Silent Confession, and an Assurance of Pardon. By confessing our wrong doing, our sin, we should then plan on changing our actions so that we do not repeat it again – repentance.

Did you read this week's email? Did you read my note? I asked for people to look over today's Gospel Lesson and to identify who you were within it.

Let us take the parable of the fig tree:

"A man had a fig tree growing 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.'"

Where is God in this story? Is God the man who owned the fig tree, the caretaker/gardener, or the fig tree itself? Who are we? Are we the owners of the fig tree, caretaker/gardener, or the fig tree itself? Perhaps --- God is more than one of the figures....or maybe we are more than one figure. Now what does it mean when we choose to label these characters.

OK – Have you decided? We could talk about this at great length because if we assign certain parts it will have an effect on the others.

First, how many chose God to be the fig tree owner? If that is the case then it is God who is the one making the decision as to what happens. God is the judge; good theological thinking and it goes right along with the title of today's sermon.

Second character – the caretaker/gardener. Who is this? Are we this person? After all in Genesis during the end of the first creation story, God blesses humankind and says: ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." And as we heard last week God even makes a covenant with us as the caretakers. Good theology, right?

But wait a minute; we have yet another character to consider....the fig tree. Aren't we the fig tree? Shouldn't we be the fig tree and this parable is warning us that if we don't repent and change our ways we will be cut down if we don't "bear fruit". Jesus just

prior to this parable says to those gathered: "...unless you repent, you too will all perish."

During this Lenten Season, as in past years, we should be attempting to change and enrich our Spiritual oneness with God. In this enrichment we should be bearing the fruits of our labor. We need to be exploring a truly more meaningful life. If I gave this sermon last month when the focus of the month was on Discipleship I would be asking you: "Have you been witnessing and attempting to share God and Christ's love with others, have you invited others to join you in worship, Bible study, or Adult Group Study?" Wait a minute, I can still ask those same questions because is not discipleship a part of the repentance process. A reaching out to others, cultivating and fertilizing the soil?

STOP, that brings us back to being the caretaker/gardener. Could we be both? I was first tempted to make Jesus that character because God placed him on this earth to teach us and build our way into the presence of God. He does not want us to be cut down and to perish, he wants us on this Lenten journey with him.

How many of you identify yourselves as Christian? If we do, then we must relate to being both the fig tree at risk of being cut down if we do not produce fruit, and walking with Jesus as the caretakers and gardeners within this world.

The one thing we are not is the one who judges whether we are to be cut down. That is God's privilege, and His alone.

Isn't it interesting, this parable doesn't end, we are not told what happens a year later. I guess we will just have to wait and see!

Stay tuned, this series will have another season!