

“Repent!”

Luke 13:1-9

11 March, 2007

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way 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 eighteen 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 dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” ’

Prayer.

Denial.

It is more than a river in Egypt,
I once heard a crusted over
social worker proclaim.
Denial is the cushion
that distributes the energy
of a fatal blow
into smaller, more manageable pieces
strung out over time
such that no single occasion
will overwhelm.
In the short term,
denial is good.
Some might even understand denial
as a means of grace.
But as time goes by
and denial is allowed to become

infected
it becomes increasingly difficult
to overcome it's intoxicating effects.

Lent is the solution to denial;
for you see,
we deny the death part of life.
We act like we are going to live
forever
without disease or illness,
that all that is right about our lives
will manifest itself,
and all that is wrong about life
will fall, be swept up, and burnt
in an unquenchable fire.

Lent is a season of repentance;
a time when we can stop
debating the trivia of faith

1/3

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- if a tower falls on a crowd
how many will go to heaven?
Or
- what happens to the soul
of one murdered
if his blood
is allowed to pool
with that of sacrificial animals?
During Lent
we can stop the endless,
intellectual, Boolean loops
and focus upon
what Jesus believes
is what is truly important:
repentance.

“Repent, or perish!”
is his message in a nutshell.
No, he isn't wearing a sandwich sign
heckling the crowd before a
Redwings or Amerk game.
“Repent, or perish!”
is the message
of a merciful Savior
who doesn't expect instant results,
but who gives us 40 days and seven
Sundays
to make the change in our lives
that leads to eternal life.
“Repent, or perish!”
becomes a violent, head-on collision
between our over-active denial
- I'm going to live for ever
and the passion, death and
resurrection
of Jesus Christ.
If we were going to live forever,
maxing out our limit
on the seven deadly sins,
then, pray tell, why would we need the
cross?

For three years the fig tree hasn't

born any fruit,
Jesus tells his disciples.
We've come through
16 days of Lent and 3 Sundays;
everyday, every moment our Savior
has
waited for our repentance.
“Should we cut down the barren fig
tree?”
“No,” Jesus says, “lets give it another
year.
Then, if it still hasn't born fruit,
cut it down.”
We still have 21 days and 2 Sundays
until Maundy Thursday.
If there still hasn't been any
repentance,
well, then, cut it down.
Just give it a little more time.

Like a prosecuting lawmaker
hiding his own
dirty little adulterous secret,
we like to squeeze out a pound of flesh
from others
a lot more
that we like to examine the short-
comings
of our own sinful stew.
As long as I'm pointing the finger at
you,
no one is looking at me,
is depravity's broken logic.

But Christ calls us to repentance;
you and me individually,
and you and me corporately,
together as the body,
the broken body
of Christ.

It can be the negative:
Repent, or die!

Or, it can be the positive:
Repent, and live!
Regardless,
the only way that leads to life,
our Savior tells us,
is by taking the route of repentance,
making the journey that begins
with an apology and a vow;
- I'm sorry.
- It will never happen again.
And only comes to completion
when reparations are made
and forgiveness is granted.

I have,
... no ...
we have,
succumbed to the siren's song
known as temptation.
We have played with fire
and it has burnt us.
We have withheld love;
love of our neighbor
and our love of God.
We have failed to be obedient;
instead, we have stubbornly
attempted to go at it alone.
We have not followed God's will;
striking out on our own path.
We have broken God's laws;
acting as if
they didn't make a difference.
We have broken community;
like a bull in a china closet,
and we have failed to hear
the cry of those in need.
We have been a disobedient church
and we have been sinful individuals.

And all that Christ asks of his disciples
is that we repent;
Stop the sinning,
and vow to sin no more.

Like the notice of a terminal illness,
Jesus gives us the gift of time.
So use it wisely.
But be forewarned:
use it or lose it,
repent and be saved,
or
do nothing and perish.
It truly is as simple as that.
Time is running out.

Allow me to lower the barrier
farther still,
to assure ourselves
of this simple compliance:
come to this communion table
with words of repentance
cast upon your lips
and written upon your heart.
As you partake of his body,
give away your own sinful body,
and step into the awareness
that together we have been newly
clothed
as the Body of Christ.
Likewise, as you drink of the cup,
allow your arteries and veins
to be filled with his life,
his love,
his Spirit.

May your participation in Holy
Communion
become synonymous with your
repentance,
and may you leave here today
completely filled with Jesus Christ.
Dearly beloved,
repent!

The Word of the Lord.
Amen.