

Luke 13:1-9 **Repentance**

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Streams of mercy never failing.

Our gradual hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” has an interesting story attached to its composer.

Robert Robinson was an English clergyman who lived in the 18th century. Not only was he a gifted pastor and preacher, he was also a talented poet and hymn writer. However, after many years in the pastorate, his faith began to drift. His Christian beliefs and training seemed of little importance to him. He left the ministry and, hoping to find some peace, he decided to travel.

On one of his trips, he met a young woman and their conversation turned to spiritual matters. She shared that she read a hymn in her daily devotional time. She was interested in his opinion on some poetry she was reading: *Come thou Fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing thy grace, Streams of mercy never failing, Call for hymns of loudest praise.*

He tried to evade her question, but she pressed him for a response. When she looked up from her reading the young woman noticed Robinson was weeping.

“What do I think of it?” he asked in a broken voice. “I wrote it. But now I’ve drifted away from Him and can’t find my way back. I’d give anything to experience again the joy I knew then.”

“But don’t you see” the woman said gently, “The way back is written right here in the third line of your poem: *Streams of mercy never ceasing.* Those streams are still flowing.”

That night Robinson recommitted his life to Christ. *(adapted from several online sources including Stories for Preaching, Word Press 2022)*

Our Lenten season began with the temptation of Jesus while he fasted for forty days in the desert, and last week, Jesus was warned by the Pharisees that Herod wanted to kill him, but he was not deterred from his mission. Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem while lamenting over the city which failed to heed the words of the prophets.

Today’s Gospel reading from Luke prepares us to hear Lent’s call to conversion and repentance.

In the Bible, “repent” means to have a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of habits and impulses to see and do things in a new way; to see things the way God sees them.

For more than three years, Jesus has been trying to cultivate faith among the people, yet relatively few have become disciples and considered fruit of his labours.



Jesus has just finished setting the crowd straight about the cost of following him and what is required for faithful discipleship, and it appears his followers still aren't getting it. He is intensifying his efforts in this fourth and final year of his ministry. As a whole, the nation refuses to repent and is now in line for destruction.

There are two parts in today's reading. Jesus begins this passage with relating Pilate's slaughter of the Galileans and the eighteen deaths of innocent bystanders from the collapse of the tower of Siloam.

People believed that the victims of disasters ~ man made and natural ~ were sinners who were being condemned by God. They sinned, and God used a tyrant, Pontius Pilate, or a collapsing tower to punish them with death.

"They got what they deserved." "God has a plan." "Everything happens for a reason." "This was God's will." "Someday when we get to heaven we'll know why."

Whenever and wherever tyrants act and towers fall we are faced with the reality that life is fragile, unpredictable, and even tragic.

We are often quick, too quick, to seek and offer easy explanations. But, Jesus says, "No," that's not how God works.

Actions and choices have natural consequences. Sometimes they are tragic and full of suffering. Other times they are fortunate and joyful. The reality is good things happen to both good and bad people. The reality is bad things happen to both good and bad people. Tyrants, towers, and God show no partiality. That is more than clear in Jesus statement, "Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

"Jesus was being blunt ~ realistically blunt, [not the usual gentle shepherd approach] ~ with his audience. Plain and simple: Events happened then, now, and in the future over which people have no control. In this parable, Jesus wants us to prepare ourselves for future events by repenting...realizing that time and chance could unexpectedly strike at any time. *(Hearty Boys Bible Study by Warren Camp, warrencampdesign.com)*

Tyrants act and towers fall.

Which brings us to the second half of this morning's message: Now is the time to examine the fig tree of our life.

Jesus often used parables to help his followers understand his message.

The parable of the barren fig tree contrasts the patience and hopefulness of the gardener with the practicality of the property owner. When told to cut down the fig tree because it is not producing fruit, the gardener counsels patience. If properly tended, the barren fig tree may yet bear fruit.

(loyolapress.com)



The fig tree represents our lives. There is still time for us to bear more fruit; we don't have to become completely different, but realize our potential, to be aware of our capacity to become the best that we can be.

The story about the fig tree is about the patience of God, our need for time to repent and grow in our faith, and it is about the "God of the many chances" who never lets go on us, and always believes in our future.

But God's patience is not without its limits. St. Augustine said, "God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination." And that's what Jesus reiterates.

It is never too late in our lives to be renewed, to turn around.

Turn around. These two words can change anyone's life. When we turn around, we change directions and begin an exciting new journey. Whatever your situation, a great story of wonderful change could be just two words away.

I know. It happened to me almost thirteen years ago on Palm Sunday 2009, and I have previously shared my sobriety journey with you.

"Repentance is an inner change of heart and mind and an outward change of life." (*John Blanchard*)

God does not lead me year by year
Nor even day by day;
But step by step my path unfolds
As He directs my way.
Tomorrow's plans I do not know.
I only know this hour
And Him who bids me walk each step
Supported by His Power.



(*"Step by Step" by Robert A. Young, Messenger calendar, 1986*)

I turned around and step by step came home. God's patience with me finally bore fruit.

It is never too late.

"One more year," the gardener told the owner.

That is not about time but about forgiveness, grace, love, and second chances. There is always a second chance, always an opening for a new beginning, a way back.

And may we all bear much fruit in the lives we lead.

Amen

