

Sermon – 3rd Sunday in Lent, OSLC- March 24th, 2019
Text- Luke 13:1-9

Second and Third Chances

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today is our 3rd Sunday in Lent- our journey continues. Today we are exposed to another parable of Jesus, actually one of the shortest parables that Jesus uttered. It's a parable involving a fig tree- very familiar to the audience of Jesus. In fact, it was the life blood of their economy.

For most of us in Wisconsin our idea of figs involves dried figs. But for the people of the Mediterranean then, and now, it was the fresh figs that Jesus was talking about. Fresh figs, delicious, sweet, and once you ate it, you would never go back to dried figs.

In my early life I had an experience involving fresh figs. I was 14, and became aware that many of my friends were receiving an allowance. I went to my mother and inquired if that would be possible for me. My mother responded to me in Norwegian and said, "Penger?, da ma du jobbe." Translated that meant, money? Then you have to work. So, I became a counter person and delivery boy for a small fruit and vegetable called Father and Son fruits and vegetables. Worked every day after school and all day Saturday. A call came in one day from Tony Anastasia. His brother was Albert, who was a big time crime boss. The caller Tony, whose nickname was Tough Tony, ran the docks in Manhattan. Everybody knew that. He wanted some fresh fruit including a case of fresh figs. Made it clear to me that he expected all should be perfect. You talk about pressure, after all, this was a mob guy. I checked every piece of fruit, every fig to make sure that they were a perfect ripeness. Off I went to deliver the order with no small amount of fear and trepidation. Tough Tony examined every piece, even ate a few of the figs and said, "you done good Kid!" Gave me a \$5 tip which was my weekly salary at the time. I became his go to kid for all of his orders.

Fresh figs, a delicacy. So important for people of the Mediterranean then and now. So let's look at the Parable of the fig tree.

At first glance it is about figs and fig trees. Simple, but maybe not so much. It's a parable about people. At the time of Jesus, a division was evident between the "perfect" ones and the not at all perfect, the common folk. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the cream of the crop. The masses, the common folk who continued to make mistakes, they should be excluded from the religious life. What value do they have? Or so the perfect ones said.

Reminds me of a Peanuts cartoon. Linus the Pharisees and Charlie us. Lucy, Linus and Charlie Brown are lying on a hilltop looking at the sky on a summer afternoon.

Lucy: If you use your imagination you can see lots of things in the cloud formations... What do you think you see, Linus?

Linus: Well, those clouds up there look to me like the map of British Honduras on the Caribbean...that cloud up there looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor... and that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen...I can see the Apostle Paul standing there to one side...

Lucy... Very good... What do you see in the clouds Charlie Brown?

Charlie Brown: Well, I was going to say a ducky and a horsie but I changed my mind.

That's what the parable is about. Let's get rid of the fig trees that produce little fruit. Let's get rid of the people who continually bear little fruit- who make too many mistakes. Jesus says in the parable - take it easy. Let me fertilize with my word and my spirit. Have patience and all will bear fruit. It's a parable for us.

We make mistakes- He grieves with us, is patient with us, forgives us, and calls us to try harder. We will bear fruit.

We reject him- He suffers with us, forgives us, is patient with us, calls us to try harder. We will bear fruit

We hurt others- even those we love.

You got it- He forgives us, is patient with us, calls us to try harder.

We will bear fruit.

Remember I shared with you a story one time. It was about a woman named Ruth. I was at a dinner party. Don't really remember what the occasion was. OSLC was growing by leaps and bounds and Ruth had a conversation with me about the

church and many of her friends who were members. I suggested that she come some Sunday and check the church out. She said she didn't think she would be welcome. Strange, I thought. She said to me that she was a single parent who had never been married. I said so what. Come and see. That's another sermon in itself when we tell others- Come and See. She did come, again and again. Become a church council member and the Treasurer of OSLC in Appleton. That's what the parable is about. Should certain people be excluded because of mistakes? Are we inclusive rather than exclusive.

Great lessons for us today. Jesus is with us. Digging around our foundation and spreading manure (his word) on us. LOVING us so much that we will bear fruit.

I hope that your fruit will reach many people.
Amen- let it be so.