

Pastor Jon's Sermon from March 23, 2025. "Repentance" based on Luke 13:1-9

Before cell phone alarms, we had these things in hotels called wake up calls. You would check into your hotel and ask the front desk to put in a wake-up call for you. The next morning, your in-room phone would ring, scaring the living daylights out of you.

We also have wakeup calls in our lives. Times when something happens to us or around us that cause us take an assessment of our life and prompt us to make a change. Yes, God's word can do that to you. But it also could be a health scare, a close call, a natural disaster, a loss, or a time when you were heading down a wrong path and become aware of it.

In the church, we call this repentance. This is what Jesus is getting at in the Gospel. There were some tragedies that sadly took people's lives and people were asking was that because they were worse sinners than everyone else? Jesus emphatically says no. But it is a wakeup call to repent now... to believe in Jesus and to make the changes in your heart and mind that can bring you closer to God and the neighbor... because you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

But instead of just talking about repentance today, I want to share a story by Oscar Wilde called "The Selfish Giant". It really moved me this week.

Every afternoon, as they were coming home from school, the children used to go and play in the giant's garden.

It was a beautiful garden. There were beautiful flowers like stars and 12 peach trees that in the springtime broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here."

One day the Giant came back. He had been away to visit his friend, the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for 7 years. The Giant felt

he said all he needed to say to the oger. So, he returned home to his castle only to find the children playing in his garden.

“What are you doing here?” He cried in a very gruff voice, and the children all ran away.

“My own garden is my own garden,” said the Giant. “Nobody will play in it except me.” So, he built a wall around it and put up a sign, “Trespassers will be prosecuted.”

He was a very selfish Giant.

The Children now had nowhere to play, and they reminisced how happy they were in the garden.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant was it still winter. Spring was forgotten in this garden without the children playing about.

“I cannot understand why Spring is late in coming,” said the Selfish Giant as he sat in the window and looked out at his cold, white garden. “I hope there will be a change in the weather.”

But Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant’s garden she gave none. “He is too selfish,” she said.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. But it was just a little bird singing outside his window. It had been so long since he had heard a bird sing that it seemed like the most beautiful music in the world. I believe Spring has come at last,” said the Giant, and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw the most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall, the little children had crept back into the garden, and they were sitting in the branches of trees. Nearly every tree had a child in it. The grass was green again, the trees were blossoming, and the children were

laughing... except in one corner of the garden. There was a little boy who could not reach up to the branches of the tree, wandering around it and crying bitterly. That section of the garden was still covered in frost and snow.

The Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said. "Now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put the poor little boy on the top of the tree and will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground forever and ever." He was really sorry for what he had done.

So, he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly and went out into the garden. But the other children were frightened and ran away... the garden became winter again. Only the little boy in the corner did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he could not see the Giant coming. And the Giant gently came up to the boy, took him into his hand, and put him into the tree. And the tree broke out into a blossom, and the birds came and sang in it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them around the Giant's neck and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant had changed, came running back, and with them came Spring. "It's your garden now, little children."

All day long in the summer they played in the garden, and every evening they came to say goodbye to the Giant.

But the little boy, the one who the Giant loved the best because he had kissed him, was nowhere to be found. The little children didn't know where he lived and had never seen him before. The giant felt sad. Every afternoon the giant still longed to see the little boy again.

Years went by and the Giant became old and feeble. He could only sit in his armchair and watch the children play amongst the beautiful flowers. But he said, "the children are the most beautiful flowers of all.

When winter came, the Giant wasn't sad anymore, for he knew it was merely Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting.

Then in the corner of the garden during winter he saw a marvelous sight. A tree was covered with marvelous blossoms and silver fruit hung down from the branches and under it stood the little boy he had loved.

The Giant ran downstairs with joy, and out into the garden to see the boy. But his face grew red with anger as he came close to the boy. He said, "Who hath dared to wound you?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the marks of 2 nails, and the prints of two nails on his little feet.

"Who hath dared to wound you?" cried the Giant. "Tell me that I may take a big sword and slay him."

"Nay," answered the child, "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" asked the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled at the Giant and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me and play in my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered in white blossoms.

Did you notice, the Giant repented. He had a change of heart and mind. He felt sorry for what he did. He also turned his words into actions and demonstrated the fruit of repentance by helping the little boy out. What you do to the least of these you have done unto me says Jesus.

This story also reminds me of the repentant thief on the cross when Jesus says, "today you will be with me in paradise." God's outstretched arms on the cross are open and waiting for all us to return so that we can be filled with God's love and grace again and that our cups may too runneth over. Now is the time of Grace, now is the day of salvation. Amen