

Sermon Lent 3 Year C

Just like today, people thought in Jesus times that bad things happened to people because they deserved it. Jesus refutes that by saying that the people who were killed in different famous disasters of his time were no more wicked than anyone else. Then Jesus tells an interesting parable about a fig tree. A man who had a fig tree was ready to cut it down because after three years the tree had produced no fruit. The man calls the tree a waste of soil, but his gardener tells the man to wait a year and let him, the gardener, dig around the tree and fertilize it before making any final decision about the tree.

I suppose that the question arises for some of us about who is the gardener and who is the man who calls the tree a waste of soil and wants to kill it. I realize that a huge number of Christians have an image of God as being judgmental and punitive. I tend to think that these sorts of people are themselves judgmental and punitive and want a god that is the same as they are. They want a god that will find the people who are not like them to be unacceptable and will punish them. I imagine that those people will see that God is the one who wants to kill the unproductive fig. I do not share that perspective. I actually think that the one that wants to kill is actually humanity. I tend to think that it is our nature to want to get rid of those who do not fit our view of what people should be. At times humanity takes this to extremes as when the Nazis wanted to eliminate those who were disabled, along with those who were Jews, those who were Gypsy, and those who were gay. It may be that both the judging and punitive types of Christians and I agree about who the gardener is. I believe that the gardener is Jesus. One of the things that I believe that Jesus came to us to accomplish was to correct that misunderstanding of the nature of God. Jesus came to show us that God is caring and compassionate.

In this parable, I see Jesus saying that he comes to give another chance to the fig to produce fruit and that he will care for the tree to help it be productive. I believe that this is what God does for us. God, as revealed by Jesus, gives us another change and breaks us the soil and fertilizes it and gives us special attention in order that we have the best possible chance to produce fruit.

God, I believe, provides us with the care that we need to produce fruit. God does this through other people. I can look at my own life and see both times in which other people provided me with the special care that enabled me to be somewhat fruitful. I also hope that there were times when I acted on God's behalf to help someone else become fruitful.

I find that this is very good news for all of us. God does not give up on us. There are second chances. God will come to our aid. And of great importance to my faith, we get to be the gardener that shows God's compassion to one who has not yet produced fruit.

AMEN