

Sermon For Sunday March 20, 2022
3rd of Lent - Luke 13:1-9

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

If you could go back and tell your 21-year-old self something, what would it be?

When I was 21, I had just finished part of my undergrad degree. I was not sure what I wanted to be when I grew up and the road to the college of Education was getting a bit dull. I was taking a year away from studying to try out ministry. The call to ministry at 20 years old seemed rather far fetched and so I was going to test things by moving out of my parent's home and into the manse in Oxbow Saskatchewan. I would, under the supervision of some very wise women be the student minister for Oxbow and Glen Ewen for a year. I turned 21 while I was there.

If I could go back and tell my 21-year-old self something, what would it be? I would tell myself not to be so afraid. When I was 21 - I was afraid I would make a mistake - afraid I would not make the right choice about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. Afraid of disappointing my parents. Afraid I would be alone. If I could go back I would tell myself not be afraid – to just be yourself - it will be okay.

If you could go back and tell your 21-year-old self something what would it be?

Nadia Bolz-Weber, Lutheran pastor and author posed this question in one of her blogs she writes: "If I could back and tell my 21-year-old self something what would it be? Well, I wish I was someone who could answer that question with something inspiring like, "never give up!" or "believe in yourself!" but honestly, I think I'd say, "You're not fat".

As middle age softens every inch of my body, heart, and spirit, I think about how my 21-year-old self had no idea how beautiful her body, heart and spirit were, instead she was dissatisfied with all of it nearly every day of her life. What a monumental waste.

So, yeah, I wish I could go back and tell myself “OMG, Enjoy it!”. ////

Today we are blessed to hear together the story of the fig tree from the Gospel according to Luke. And it got me thinking that my 21-year-old self would have connected to that fig tree story.

At 21 we are all, well along the path of wondering, why bad things happen. And our fig tree story seems to hold a bit of wisdom - all be it incomplete - as to why. According to the gospel writer Luke - Jesus had something to say about such wonderings. Jesus seems to suggest that bad things don't happen to you because you are bad but rather because bad stuff happens. The Galileans were victims of a man, blinded by power, to command such horrific slaughter and the second group were victims of poor construction. Bad things happen to good people.

The call of Jesus to repent is curious but I think it has something to do with the urgency of how Jesus wanted others to follow in his way. The ones who died by Pilate's hand were Galileans – they were not followers of “Jesus' way” and those killed, when the tower of Siloam fell on them in Jerusalem were also not followers of Jesus. I think Jesus was trying to say that people who follow the way of radical love, who follow his way - live deeply and there isn't a moment to lose. He is urging the hearers of this story to do what you need to do to follow – to not let another moment pass by, follow the way of love now - for tomorrow is not guaranteed. The people who died were not bad or deserving of their end it is just that their lives ended and there was so much more.

What then of the second part of the story and that poor fig tree. Is that tree going to produce figs or is it going to be fuel for the campfire or something in between? The end of the story is not ours to read. Like our 21-year-old selves we do not know what the future is going to hold.

The Landowner in the story is a familiar soul. Many of us understand what the landowner sees in that poor fig tree. For we are all well versed in that vision - It is a vision promoted and perpetuated by our North American society:

If it isn't useful then it is just using up limited resources.

If it doesn't produce something we can sell, then it is of no value.

If it doesn't follow the norm - produce when it should - then something is wrong with it and therefore it is disposable.

The vision of the landowner is very familiar even if we have never seen a fig tree.

Many of us look in the mirror with "Landowner vision".

We look in the mirror with Landowner vision and we see graying hair and changing abilities and we ask - what good am I? I am a burden using up valuable resources.

We look in the mirror with "Landowner vision and we see that we cannot find work or find our way through addiction or fight our way out of poverty and we conclude we are of no value.

We look in the mirror with "Landowner vision and see something yet unknown - our gender identity, our sexual orientation, our differing abilities and we think we don't fit the supposed norm therefore something is wrong – we are disposable.

The vision of the landowner is very familiar even if we have never seen a fig tree. //

It is the vision of the blessed Gardener that we need to embrace. The one who is patient. Who takes a posture of nurture and care. Who sees potential and lives with hope for tomorrow. Who isn't afraid of doing what needs to be done even if it means shoveling a few loads of manure. Unpleasant yes, and yet necessary to give the fig tree every opportunity to be its true self.

When we were 21 we could not read the end of our story. It was unknown and was only found through our living.

We do not know how it ends for the fig tree, it is unknown and would only be found in the way of those living around the tree. The choices they made.

And maybe that is the point of the gospel story. We do not know, nor can we know what the end of the story - or our story will be - but it is in the way we live now that we write the end.

When we were 21 years old we had no idea where we would be today. It was in the living of everyday along the way that determined our today. My hunch is the journey to *here* and *now* was not all sunshine and roses. There were days when the Landowners vision got the best of us but there were days too that the Blessed Gardeners vision lead us on.

Now you might not be where you hoped to be this day – and I'm sorry – please remember that your story is not finished. None of our stories are ended yet, there is still time. The Blessed Gardener is with you, with each of us. But time is of the essence.

In 10 – 15 years what do you think you will want to tell yourself today?

Don't be afraid, you're not fat, enjoy it more, squeeze as much joy out of each day that you can, be generous, make more friends, say "I love you" more.

In 10-15 years what do you think you will want to tell yourself today?

Given the state of our world it is hard for some of us to even imagine 10-15 years down the road. Nothing seems for sure – we do not know the end of the story. But if we embrace the vision of the blessed Gardener. The one who is patient. Who takes a posture of nurture and care. Who sees potential and lives with hope for tomorrow, who isn't afraid to do what needs to be done even if it means shovelling a few loads of manure. Maybe - just maybe - we won't be writing our world, or each other off, but rather we will be knee deep in the muck of this world, nurturing and caring, hoping and creating what will one day be a world of peace, of justice and of abundant love. And the fig trees will bloom, and the fruit will be sweet. Amen.

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or 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? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

⁶Then 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. ⁷So 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?' ⁸He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."

May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of holy scripture. Amen