

Just One More Year

March 7, 2010

(Lent 3 – Year C)

Luke 13:1-9

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Last Monday, at the meeting of the Rotary Club of Waco, our guest speaker was Dr. George Wright.

Dr. Wright is the President of Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Texas.

The President of Prairie View A&M spoke about how his university does not give up on our young people.

Dr. Wright spoke about how Prairie View A&M gives young adults in our society a second chance.

As an illustration of Prairie View A&M's commitment to second and third and fourth chances in life,

He noted that, to this day, the football program at Prairie View holds the record for the longest losing streak in the history of college football.

From 1989 through 1998, Prairie View A&M lost 80 consecutive football games.

That means that for almost 10 years, Prairie View A&M never won a single football game.

Yet at the end of each year, Prairie View was granted just one more year to turn their football program around.

Every year, Prairie View was given one more year to bear fruit.

Today, Prairie View A&M football has finally born fruit.

Last season, in the fall of 2009, the Prairie View Panthers went undefeated in conference play.

Yet Prairie View's success could not have happened if the football program had been cut down during those lean seasons of racking up 80 consecutive losses.

Prairie View's success has only happened because someone spoke up and said:

“Let it alone;

For one more year.”

Football at Prairie View was given a second and a third and a fourth chance to bear fruit.

And Jesus tells us a story about a fig tree, a fig tree that is given a second and a third and a fourth chance to bear fruit.

Jesus tells us this parable:

A man planted a fig tree in his vineyard.

And this man comes back each and every year to look for fruit on his fig tree.

And each year, the man finds no fruit on the tree.

So the man tells the gardener:

“For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none.

[Get the ax and] cut it down!”

Yet the gardener begs to put the ax of revenge down as the gardener pleads:

“Sir, give the fig tree another chance, until I dig around it and put manure on it.

Let it alone;

For [just] one more year.”

When the gardener pleads,

“Let it alone,”

The word that the gardener uses, in the original Greek language, is the same verb that is also translated as “to forgive.”

It is the same word that Jesus uses when he is nailed to the Cross and pleads:

“Father, forgive them.”

From his Cross, Jesus pleads with his Father to put down the ax of revenge against us.

From his Cross, Jesus pleads for us fruitless fig trees that we will be spared and forgiven.

From his Cross, Jesus pleads to let us be, he pleads to forgive us,

For just one more year.

Forgive the fig tree, for not bearing any fruit in over 3 years.

Forgive the Prairie View football program, for not winning a single game in a 10 year stretch.

Forgive us for being a revengeful and spiteful and hateful, for thousands and thousand of years.

Forgive, forgive, forgive – again and again, even when there is no fruit on the tree and even when forgiving is very difficult.

A little over three years ago, in October of 2006, a terrible tragedy occurred at West Nickel Mines School.

West Nickel Mines School was an Amish one-room schoolhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

On that fateful fall morning, Charles Carl Roberts pulled a truck up to the one room schoolhouse, went inside with his gun and began to take hostages.

He lined the schoolgirls up against the chalk rail and began shooting. Roberts killed 5 girls before turning the gun on himself.

As awful as that shooting tragedy was, what was even more amazing was the reaction of the Amish people in Lancaster County.

Immediately, the people not only grieved the loss of the children in their community, but they also immediately offered words of forgiveness for the killer and for his family.

Jack Meyer, a member of the community living near the Amish in Lancaster County, explained:

“I don’t think there’s anybody here that wants to do anything but forgive - and not only reach out to those who have suffered a loss in that way - but to reach out to the family of the man who committed these [horrible] acts.”¹

The Amish people did not immediately pull out the ax of retribution and revenge in response to the shooting rampage that killed their children.

But instead the Amish said:

¹ Via cnn.com

“Forgive.

For one more season, give the fruitless fig tree another chance.

Let it be;

For just one more year.”

I don't know about you, but I think that it would be very difficult to forgive the man who had shot and killed your daughter in cold blood.

I think that it would be very difficult to not want to pick up the ax and cut down that fruitless fig tree.

However, Jesus calls us to this radical forgiveness.

Yet I don't believe that we wake up suddenly one day able to forgive a mass murderer for killing our children.

I believe that we take tiny steps to get to radical forgiveness.

We take these tiny steps by first practicing forgiveness for the small things.

In the parable of the fig tree, the gardener pleads to save the fig tree for one more year.

And during that year, the gardener will irrigate the tree with water and will fertilize the tree with manure.

We become a more forgiving people when we irrigate and fertilize our lives, taking small steps to becoming more forgiving.

And we take small steps toward becoming more forgiving when we put down the ax of revenge and embrace a more earthy humility.

We put down the ax when we are in the midst of a fight with our spouse – and we are the first one to break down and say:

“I am sorry.”

We put down the ax when we are in the middle of a disagreement with our adult children and we have the guts to say:

“You know, maybe you are right.”

We put down the ax when an annoying co-worker pushes our buttons -
and we are humble enough to say:
“Why don’t we try it your way this time.”

When we put down the ax of revenge and control that is ready at the root
of the tree,
When we water and feed our relationships with earthy humility,
Then maybe next year, fruit will begin to appear.

So give the fig tree a second and third and fourth chance.
Put down the ax of revenge.
Forgive and forgive and forgive again...
For just one more year.

AMEN.

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