

March 23 Sermon. Luke 13:1-9; Isaiah 55:1-9

“We Get Second Chances”

"You've blown it" is one of the biggest lies of the enemy. Let's face it - we all have a season (or seasons) in our lives we can look back on with pain, shame and regret; however, reflecting on the pain of our past will not absolutely rob us of the POTENTIAL of our future...

...because we serve a God of Second Chances.

Peter flat out denied Christ - and 50 days later was anointed to preach a sermon where over 3,000 people received Christ (Acts 2).

Thomas doubted the resurrection, and in His time, Jesus revealed Himself to Thomas...and Thomas spent the rest of his life spreading the Gospel.

Paul murdered people who confessed the name of Christ--but Jesus changed Him from a murderer to a miracle working evangelist.

Knowing that God is a God of Second Chances doesn't give us an excuse to sin - but rather the power to break free from it.

No matter who you are, no matter what we've done - God STILL has a plan for your life, and it is far greater than anything you could ever imagine.

Can you believe he pouted because God didn't give him what he wanted? He built a little booth to make himself comfortable (of course). Then he looked out over the city. And God said, "Ah Jonah, you like to be comfortable. Here, I will grow this great bush to keep your head from getting hot in the desert sun." This bush sprang up, and Jonah loved its shade.

Then God sent a worm to destroy the root of the bush, and it died supernaturally quickly. Then Jonah was visibly upset. God, you give me some shade, then take it away? "I am so angry I wish I were dead"

Then God brings it home. "Jonah, is it right for you to be angry with me over the demise of this bush?"

You want me to destroy these people you don't like. One hundred twenty thousand people and animals too. And you are upset about the loss of your comfortable shady spot? Jonah, I am the creator of all things. I love all my creatures and creation. These people you don't like, I gave a second chance to, just like I did you. Sometimes, my dear Jonah, people can and do change. Don't fill your heart with hatred. There is still time for you, Jonah. There is still time for you.

That is our message this morning! There is time, now. We get a second chance. Jesus, as he often does, circumvents a dangerous political answer to the crowd by moving the conversation to a longer view. Taking the concern of judgement from the faithful, Jesus brings the reality of fallen humanity to the forefront. The Jews killed in the temple were no more unrighteous than anyone else. Everyone is fallen and in need of God's mercy. To say that those who were killed by Rome in God's temple were killed in judgement would mean that people killed in obviously judgement-free ways – like the people who died when a city tower fell – were also judged by God. The fact that only a handful have perished is a sign of God's mercy. It is a call to repentance for those living. Turn your lives around! Jesus gives us a second chance.

Jesus says we are like a fig tree that isn't producing any fruit. Fig trees were created to grow fruit. If they are not producing figs, they are not serving their intended purpose. No sane person would continue to water and feed a fig tree that wasn't producing fruit. Eventually a fig tree this isn't producing fruit, will be cut down so that something else can be grown in its place.

We are, in the same way as the fig tree, were created by God in a particular way for a purpose. We were created to be in relationship with God producing the fruits that

come through his love. If we are not producing the fruits of love, we are not serving our intended purpose.

Here is the good news. God does not give up on us. God will not forever tolerate our isolation from him and our lack of love. God continues to fight for us!

We see that in Isaiah 55. Israel frequently turns away from God, not listening and not following. They thought they didn't need God and times when life became so overwhelming they fell into despair. They neglected their faith. They were consumed with "their" way, not "God's" way. Yet, they were given a second chance. "Give ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant with you. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." Isaiah 55:8. The Prophet Isaiah says to Israel, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6)

How do we apply the text this morning? First, it shows we lack unlimited time. We think we have all the time in the world. Life has a quality of crisis and immediacy about it. This is a recurring theme in Luke's Gospel. Recall the story of the rich fool who accumulated more and more stuff and kept building bigger barns to hold his possessions. But then disaster strikes: "This very night your life will be required of you." The rich fool's time is up, and all that he has worked for counts for nothing.

Second, God looks for fruitfulness. God doesn't look for success, but for fruitfulness. Jesus says, "You can judge a tree by its fruits." What fruit does God want you to produce?

And that brings me to the theme of the passage. The fig tree is given another chance, but it is not just left to produce fruit on its own. No, the gardener prunes it, and fertilizes it, and digs a ditch for good irrigation. In other words, if the fig tree produces good fruit, it will be the result of some real effort. I truly believe that is our church. God gives all those things to us. But the ongoing effort to make the most of what God gives will be what produces good fruit. It is the hard work. But it is work that produces fruit.

That is the heart of God. Ultimately, we see that the time is now to turn our lives around. Not tomorrow, but now. God gives us a second chance and that there is still time for us. Time that God said to the Israelites. Time that God gave to Jonah and the people of Nineveh. Time that God gave to the Apostle Paul, when the risen Lord appeared to him and King Agrippa on the road to Damascus. Before he became Paul, he was Saul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you?" Paul said.

"I am Jesus who you are persecuting," the Lord replied. Jesus gave him a second chance. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me." Now arise and go, and tell all the people you encounter with your words and the way you live your life, that God is a loving God-slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Will you go? Will you take your second chance and produce fruit? Amen.