

The Third Sunday of Lent
St. Luke 13:1-9
March 24, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Second Chances

“So [the owner of the vineyard] (he) said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ “ ‘Sir,’ [the worker in the vineyard] (man) replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ ”

One last chance, at the behest of the worker in the vineyard. And that work? The parable is about Jesus appealing for one last chance for the unproductive fig tree. He will even improve the environment and fertilize the tree, in hopes that it will change and be productive. He is hopeful for a change.

Have you ever been given one last chance? Did you take it? Or did you ‘keep on keeping on’ in your old ways and habits, thinking everything would be all right? I am afraid I have been guilty of that several times over. It is so easy to keep on making the same old mistake, even when you are called on it. The logic goes something like, ‘I have gotten away with it so far, why shouldn’t I believe I can continue to do so?’ Then there is no change, and finally the judgment day arrives, and your tree is uprooted, and the plaintive cry goes up, I never thought you would run out of patience with me! Have you ever passed up your second or last chance like that?

Sometimes the chances for change are minor, like—stop eating junk food or cookies, but they add up to more serious problems with your health in the future if you don’t exercise moderation. Other times the chances we are given when they fall on our deaf ears may add up to the loss of a job or a relationship or a marriage. There is an implied teaching in this story: listen up before it’s too late! Take advantage of the second chance!

Don’t ignore the advantage of a grace that has been given you. Do not procrastinate or continue to make the same mistake. It may not be easy, but the chance you have been given is a life-line: make the necessary and overdue changes!

The more time that pours over the dam, the shorter your opportunity and chances get. There comes a day when you will be out of time. Why do we procrastinate?

When the burdens of the past intransigence are lifted, when the mistakes we have been made are forgiven, a great burden is lifted from your shoulders and your back. Do all in your power to change and correct past mistakes. Do not be half hearted.

Pencil & Eraser... Another chance!

With an eraser, your mistakes made in pencil can be rubbed away. You can start over and try again, avoiding the mistake you have just made. In pencil, your mistakes are not written in permanent ink. Yes, when you erase the paper, some impressions and remnants from past mistakes are left behind. However, it is a chance to correct your mistakes and move on. What happens in school if you leave your mistakes and walk away? What happens to your personal accounting or taxes if you don't correct your mistakes? What happens in your calendar if you have written—in future appointments in permanent ink? What a mess is left behind, trust me. And when you have made too many mistakes with your pencil, sometimes it is best to tear the sheet off the pad and start fresh, with a clean sheet of paper. Starting over this way is often a relief, and a chance to get things right.

It is also like a chalkboard that's been erased: the more it gets cloudy with chalk dust from erasure the harder it is to read. There is lots of dust, and it is not completely clean. The more you reuse it, the less easy it is to read, until it becomes difficult to see what is written clearly. It becomes very cloudy, like we do, until it is washed off with a sponge. Then you have a 'clean slate,' and can make a fresh start. ... You have been washed with the blood of the lamb. You are not cloudy, you are clean. You have been given a vital and very important second chance.

Second chances mean God is a God of compassion. God is not a harsh judge saying, you messed up, now pay the consequences. While there are consequences to be paid, we are not without hope. We are not condemned to an eternity of punishment, though at first it may seem like it. Another chance means just that, hope to be redeemed.

Being Fruitful and Being Fruitless...

It is easy to look at someone else's life and conclude they are wasting the oxygen we have to breathe. I am reminded of how easy it is to look at a homeless person pushing a grocery cart by the side of the road and thinking, 'what a waste of a life.' And then the words of the Ghost of Christmas Present from Dickens' Christmas

Carol echo in my head: (in response to Scrooge's wicked saying that he 'exclaimed what he meant, indeed with all his heart...') 'Let them die and decrease the surplus population' "Man," said the Ghost, [speaking to Scrooge] "if [man] you be in heart, not adamant, and forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered [just] What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child."

Taking up space and precious oxygen. Not a very Christian thought, is it?

Forgiveness is implied in this story of the past unfruitfulness of the fig tree. Forgiveness is implied in your own personal story when you have been given yet another chance by a loving and compassionate God. God wants us to succeed in our living. Success is not measured by worldly wealth and achievements, but by the fruitfulness of our spiritual journey upon which we are supposed to be returning to our source of life: returning to God and connecting in harmony with the world around us. To eschew our God given grace moments for change, is to find ourselves waking up one morning, out of time on the old clock. We don't want the measure of our lives to be the observation, "Well he took up a lot of space and oxygen, what a waste!"

Every new day that you wake up and live is a clean slate, a fresh start. Set aside the mistakes of the past. Erase them from your life and consciousness. Don't let them drag you down yet again another day. Every day is a new chance. This is the day God has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it! Thank you God ! AMEN