

May the love I show speak for me
March 23 2025 Sermon
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? **3** No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. **4** Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”

6 Then 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. **7** So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘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?’ **8** He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. **9** If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

—

May the life I live speak for me
May the life I live speak for me
When I'm lying in the grave and there's nothing left to say
May the life I live speak for me

This is a song I learned in Boston this week, standing alongside 200 clergy, praying for our immigrant neighbors, before we joined thousands of others up at the Statehouse.

I didn't have time to go. But I didn't have time to not go.

Life is short, you see.

It's so easy to hear judgment in Jesus' words. If you're not careful you could die like those sinners. God's gonna getcha. It's so easy to imagine Jesus saying, they got what they deserved. God made the tower fall. God made Pilate walk into their sanctuary. Be careful or God will smite you.

It's so easy to do that math: Doing good equals good happening to you; messing up equals punishment happening to you.

But that's not the message. Jesus says it right in our text this morning,

“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? **3** No, I tell you...”

We worked pretty hard on this text in Bible Study - and can I just say, if you have Tuesday mornings free, come on over, you won't regret it.

There is something Jesus wants us to know about how we live our life, but it's not that God is watching, ready to smite us, knocking down towers.

May the love I show speak for me....

One way or the other, life is short. We're mortal.

Pilates who persecute
Towers that fall
The car that crashes
The cancer diagnosis.
Life is short.

That's not God's doing.

God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:45)

Jesus' question is how we live while life is short. Jesus says that we should experience metanoia - that's the word translated repent - that we should be transformed and turn our lives from whatever is harmful toward what is good. One writer says Jesus wants us to embrace the idea of the kingdom on earth, and live in God's kingdom right now.

May the love I show speak for me....

There is a second portion of the text today, a parable, taking us into a vineyard. Jesus' parables are like Zen koans, onion layers, kaleidoscopes. The second and third time you read them, something new emerges. You turn them just a bit and the perspective changes. There's a vineyard, a fig tree, a landowner and a gardener. Who is supposed to be whom?

In Bible Study we talked about God being the great gardener, always seeking to nourish us, giving us second chance and third chance and one more year. And this is a good reading, because we all need the grace upon grace that God offers.

And, turning the kaleidoscope just a bit, perhaps Jesus wants us to use our little window of life to be good gardeners.

To use the life we live and the love we give to see that which is precious and beautiful and vulnerable and protect and nourish it. To not let anyone cut it down. To hold out hope for its thriving. To do our part, even when manure is involved, even when it is hard, even when it seems like hope is lost to hold on to hope like a gardener carefully, carefully, keeps tending.

The tree may be

Who does the fig tree symbolize, in this way of reading? For me, the fig tree is whoever is most vulnerable and precious and beautiful and at risk of being cut down. That changes moment to moment but I bet if you ask yourself who is at most risk of being cut down these days, the list will grow quickly.

The poet Mary Oliver has a couplet that is quoted so often:

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

It is often taken as a commission to live the fullest life you can, because life is short.

But like a parable, like a koan, read the whole poem, and (and later, read it a second and a third time),

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean —
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Read the whole poem, and read it a second and a third time, and we are called back to loving the world like the world's creator...

Who made the world?

Not us, for sure. But God our Creator, *God* made us to notice, and to revel, and to nurture, and to protect, and to tend the garden in all its wonder and all its diversity, every vine and branch and surprising fig tree, and to love, and to share joy. Knowing that life is short, God made us to live bravely, to love our neighbors, to protect what is at risk of being cut down, because life is short. So we live so that in the end our lives speak for us, we love so that in the end the world has been loved, we share joy with a world in drought and doubt.

May the joy I share speak for me....Amen.