

Sunday, March 24, 2019 Sermon
Third Sunday in Lent

Need I remind you how many times I've said life is difficult? Life is difficult. That, and things happen. It has been this way all along. Maybe that's why it's so difficult sometimes. We think that only the times we live in are hard and difficult. Well, for those eighteen in Siloam, it was not a good day. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or were they? Maybe the problem is not the difficulty of life, but our unwillingness to trust the Lord in and through all things.

There is often a difference between what we say and what we think. There is often a difference between what we let others see and the reality of who we really are. We may give up on one another, but the Lord does not give up on us. You or I may think another beyond hope, but the Lord holds out hope to the very end.

I heard an interesting twist on the upper room last night of Jesus' experience. The seat of honor was given to Judas. The reason for this was that Jesus was giving one last opportunity for Judas to repent and return to Jesus. We know he didn't and the last words Jesus said to him was, "Go, what you do, do quickly." Nothing but grace from Jesus every step of the way. While this was going on, Simon Peter was being childish and pouting. Is it any wonder that he would deny Jesus later that same night? He was angry that he was not given the seat of honor. All of this is so far beyond being or not being in the right or wrong place. It is about realizing the absolute sovereignty of God.

Jesus answers the question posed Him by telling a parable. Things are not the way some think they should or imagine them to be. They want to take matters into their own hands and be done with the problem. Well, for the Lord it will be the way He intends. I want you to catch how blunt our Lord is. "Dig around it and put manure on it." Have you ever thought that when "it" hits the fan that it is the Lord preparing for a harvest? You may not be bearing fruit this year. And next year you might be pruned yet again. Even in the third year. But it is the Lord who is doing the pruning. It is the Lord who is preparing for the harvest.

If it helps, perhaps there is another way we can think about these things. Remember this the next time you want to think along the lines of, "The Lord could not possibly have had anything to do with . . ." In a very simple way, ask yourself the question, "If God is all powerful, is not everything in His purview?" By this I am not answering any question about why, how, justice, or all of the things – let's face it – we simply do not have the ability to answer. Yet, the farther one is from God the more outraged they seem to be by the idea that God does not simply stop all evil and does not simply take care of everything the way some imagine God should take care of things. But it is as simple as asking why someone who thinks so childishly should expect anything other than a childish answer to their question. It's like that age old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people." Well, if I ever meet a good person, I'll ask them. If you find that offensive, then why did Jesus ask, "Why do you call me good?" He then went on to say that only God is good. Now, if only God is good, why in the world should we expect answers to questions when cannot even ask the right questions or ask them truthfully?

Yet, God does provide answers and one of them is that we do get fertilized. When that happens, it is for the purpose of causing us to bear some kind of fruit. Keep in mind that the real problem we all often face is the truth that we are not the masters of our destiny. In fact, we are not masters at all; even though some act as if they were. We live in an age where many are fat and sassy. We have things pretty easy and if we don't like how somebody does something. We

just go down the street to another who is more to our liking. You may, for a period, ignore Jesus and play the games that many play, but the day will come when you stand before Jesus.

Let us tie together principles that are all over the place in Scripture. We know that the wages of sin is death. Sin kills us. We know that Jesus came to save sinners. If you are not a sinner, you really do not need to be here. You do not need communion and a baptism will do you no good. For the rest of us, we need what only Jesus can provide. But what is it going to take to get you to realize this? Ah, this is where the power of this parable comes in. There are many who go to church and have no clue that they have no clue. It really does not matter what game they are playing, if those who come to church and do not realize that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of us all, well then, I just pray that one day they will. Until then, we need not cater to their incessant whining and constant requests for answers to the questions. Even in this parable Jesus does not answer the question, but He does tell us what we need to know.

We are to abide in Him. We are to bear fruit. We can do nothing without Him. The Father will prune us. It is not about being perfect, but about being made perfect. It is not about figuring out where we are going, but about being on the journey. Over and over again the Lord is telling us how this plays out.

Everything has a purpose. When you are complaining about how hard things are, just remember what Jesus is saying. Sometimes the manure needs to be spread to bring about the fruit the Lord intends you to bear.

Let me give you some friendly advice. There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who will be saved by Jesus and those who reject His salvation. If you are one of the former, and I most certainly pray you are, you really have no option. Either you are going to follow Jesus, or else He is going to make sure you do. Mind you, I am not talking about those who reject the Lord. I am talking about those who say (and really mean) that they want salvation, but they're just not in the mood for it today. Well to those I say that the Lord is going to keep piling it on until you cry out to Him for salvation.

If you want to be the stubborn, cheap, worthless soil, and not bear the fruit the Lord intends, do not be surprised to see your world crumbling around you. None of us is so special that we don't have our part to do. In our spoiled, "Ooh I scratched the polish on my nail" world, we can grumble to one another all we want, but the Lord is serious about saving us. So, unless you want it piled high and deep, here's my suggestion: just ask the Lord what He would like for you to do. Pretty simple, huh? Oh, and as I told you two weeks ago about praying to the Lord, do not tell Him His business. Actually ask Him. He will answer. You see, this faith life is the real life and He will do everything necessary to make sure that not one is lost.

As to bad things happening? Well, there is sin in the world and sinners do bad things. The miracle is that God flips this around to make good out of the bad things that happen. Not only that, He has promised that amidst all of the manure that is piled on us in this world, He is going to produce the fruits of repentance and the fruits of salvation. It may be too graphic for some, but do you realize what really happens in nature only points to the reality of what God does through salvation. He takes the yuck (do I have to graphically describe it?) and from it grows the fruits and vegetables we eat, the flowers we enjoy, and all of the flora and fauna that sustains life. He does the same with us spiritually.

So, if you do not like what I am saying today, good! If you think the topic a bit stinky, we're in the right place. If you think you are above these things, think again. Our Lord has spoken and He has promised you that He will stop at nothing that you may be where He is. Not

only that, but He has gone to prepare a place for you that you may be with Him forever. We all are offenders against our perfect, just, and merciful Lord of all. He reconciles us through the unfathomable gift of grace He makes possible through the cross.

Come then and stop reacting like the world. There are many who just don't get it. The next time the soil of your life is fertilized, expect some growth. Find out what the Lord is up to and join Him there. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened. Being Christian is a whole lot easier than most think. If only we'd get with Jesus' plan and stop needing to be fertilized.

Amen.