

## **Lent 2 – Bearing Fruit: Luke 13:1-9, 31-35**

I'm going to start our conversation this morning with the last part of today's reading – the image of Jesus as a mother hen.

First of all this image joins a long line of maternal images for God. The old Testament uses images like a nursing mother and a mother bending over to teach her child to walk. Paul uses childbirth images for God's work to bring new creation into being.

Any image of God or Jesus as this hypermasculine entity dies on contact with the actual words of the Bible.

So, hens...

When my family lived on the farm, we raised chickens. I have had some bad experiences in my life with poultry – one was with an angry rooster on our farm. The other was an experience years later with a one-winged gander in Leavenworth, KS.

But hens usually don't bother you – unless they think their chicks are in danger. Then they can become fierce.

I watched a couple of YouTube videos of hens protecting their chicks. One was a hen protecting her chicks from a crow and the other from an eagle.

The hen won both times.

There were also several videos showing a hen protecting her chicks from a snake. I opted not to watch those – life has enough stress without watching videos of Cobras attacking baby chicks.

Jesus longs to be that protective mother hen...the one that can protect God's people from danger. The problem is that the evil force from which Jerusalem needed to be protected was themselves.

And the same is true for us. The self-destructive ways of sin and faithlessness destroy ourselves and others.

And they also make us unable to even see the jam we're in.

How often does Jesus lament over us the same way he did Jerusalem?

Ultimately Jesus' protection and salvation took a direction nobody expected...and one that spanned all eternity. Jesus didn't defeat death by blocking it or fighting it, but by giving in to it...and then rising victorious over it.

Trusting Jesus doesn't mean bad things will never happen to us.

Now we know that in our heads. But when bad stuff does actually happen, especially when it's one thing after another, we begin to wonder.

That takes us to the first part of today's reading. At the beginning of today's passage, Jesus is teaching in front of a crowd of thousands.

As he's teaching, people can raise issues and ask questions. In this scene he gets one familiar to anyone who preaches and teaches. Some terrible things have happened. A ruthless governor, Pontius Pilate, has committed a gruesome murder of some people in Galilee...people who likely didn't deserve it.

A tower has collapsed near the pool of Siloam, killing 18 people.

Whether spoken or not, the question often becomes, why? Why those people? Why does God allow these things to happen?

Was this God's punishment for something they had done?

The answer to why bugs us today as much as it did then. Why did this pandemic happen? Is it God's punishment?

Humans have concocted a variety of ways to cope with terrible tragedy over the eons of time. Some preachers will say yes, it is God's punishment. In our era, things like natural disasters have too many times been touted as God's punishment for our acceptance of LGBTQ people.

Another human response is to look for someone to blame – who should be sued? And while accountability is important, the layers of responsibility often go deeper than we want them to.

If the Tower of Siloam fell because the contractor cut corners, what about a system that is so focused on profit that corner-cutting is almost inevitable? Are we complicit in systems that hurt people?

Other times, when things are a mess, we look for a new savior...often a political one. We look for another god – complete with a golden statue to worship.

Or we simply say, a good god would never let this stuff happen – therefore there is either no god, or god is not good.

The problem of evil and tragedy is one that has always been with us. It's one without easy answers.

Jesus doesn't give an easy answer to the why question either. He makes it clear that these things did not come about because the victims were more sinful than anyone else. What happened was not God's punishment.

What he does say, in essence, is that the way of the world is that bad things happen. We do not live in a world where some all-powerful deity reaches down to stop the bad stuff. God does not deal with death by blocking it from happening.

We don't know completely what lies in store for us in this life. We don't really know if we'll die of old age or when a tower falls on us or a semi hits us on a slick highway.

But whatever happens, we can trust God's faithfulness and love, whether we live or die.

The painful and tragic things that happen are always reminders to turn back to the embrace of God's faithfulness and love. That's what repent means.

The parable of the fig tree represents our lives in the meantime. In the time before we die of old age or a tower falls on us, we are called to bear fruit in the world.

We are called to let our faith be strengthened through our prayer, study, and worship.

And we're called to live out that faith. Paul's letter to the Galatians gives as good a list as any for what that kind of life looks like.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are what our lives look like when we don't block the work of that Spirit. Lives lived in the Spirit are lives of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What kind of world could this be if even just those who claim to be Christian actually bore the fruits of the Spirit?

What if we met hate with love instead of retribution?

What if poverty was met with kindness and generosity instead of judgment?

What if arrogance and self-righteousness were met with gentleness and faithfulness?

What if violence was met with peace and love?

It doesn't take too much time on social media or reading or watching the news to know that we've got some work to do.

But God is patient. In the gospels, God's judgement is definitely a thing. But God is willing to be patient while we sort this out and get back on track.

When our lives have not borne the fruit God was hoping for, God keeps offering forgiveness and another chance.

God gives the gardener more time to tend us...water and nurture us. Christ is that gardener, and the gardener keeps working to turn us into fruit-bearing people.

That feeding and watering happen in our times of solitude for prayer, study, contemplation, and communion with God.

The feeding and watering happen in a community of other people also seeking to bear fruit in the world. We gather in community to be transformed by the Spirit through the word of God and the sacraments.

We share burdens and meet Christ in the suffering of others.

We discern together how those fruits of the Spirit play out in our time and place.

And we recognize that life is hard...that things can get ugly. And when things get ugly, it's hard to live a life of peace, joy, love, kindness, gentleness, self-control, joy, faithfulness, and generosity.

Maybe in those times when it seems too hard, taking a bit of a breather in the sheltering wings of Jesus is what we need to do.

When we're tired of the bitterness, tired of the pandemic, tired of Zoom glitches, tired of winter, taking a breather under those protective wings is what we need most.

Then, rested and loved, we go back out to bear fruit in the world around us.



Our image today is of that hen with her chicks. Take some time for silent reflection on the image. You're invited to imagine yourself resting there.

As we end, may this time of resting in the wings of Christ make you ready to bear fruit in the coming week.