



TOUCH POINT

Let It Be – Touchpoint for March 16, 2022

Luke 13:1-9 (NRSV) ¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

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

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Let it be Lord, for one more year...”

We like to keep score. At heart we are scorekeepers. In our minds we carry a calculator. Checking to see who’s up, who’s down, who’s in, who’s out. Mostly we like to keep score to make sure everyone is getting what they deserve. You know, that reward and punishment kind of thing.

The interesting thing is that we seem to have two different kinds of calculators – one for THEM ... and one for US ... or one for ME.

The one for THEM seems to be directed toward making sure THOSE PEOPLE get what they deserve on the punishment side of the reward/punishment paradigm. And the one for US, or the one for ME, is directed for making sure I get what I deserve on the reward side of the reward/punishment paradigm.

Punish others, reward me. Those are the calculators – the calculations – that are embedded in our minds, our hearts, our souls.

Our Bible passage for today is a story of these calculators.

In the first part of the passage, people come to Jesus to report to him some juicy story. It is the kind of story you would find in the National Enquirer.

“GALILEANS BLOOD MIXED WITH SACRIFICE!!!”

It is horrible. It is unimaginable. It is unspeakable... which is why some people want to speak about it, especially to Jesus.

How could such a thing happen? What could those people possibly have done to deserve such a fate? Maybe they angered Pilate. C’mon Jesus, give us the skinny on what horrible people they must have been.

Jesus draws them in even more by topping them with his own story. How about those people who had the Tower of Siloam fall on them? Who did they anger? Should we include them too?

You can almost see the sparkle in their eyes. *“Jesus is with us! He gets it! He is going to justify for us why bad things happen only to bad people, and we can glory in their pain and suffering.”*

The people coming to Jesus are all too human. Something horrible has happened, and for them to wrap their minds around it they must come to some conclusion that those people were to blame. Because if they weren't to blame, then perhaps the same thing could happen to me.

And that is something I do not want to have to wrap my mind around.

We live in a world of reward and punishment. It influences our work, our relationships, and ultimately even our theology. We use it to protect ourselves, glorify ourselves, justify ourselves. We think if we just live correctly we can escape any harm.

We have come to believe that everything has its foundation on a cause/effect scenario. Or everything is grounded in reward/punishment.

But in the Bible passage for today, Jesus shakes that foundation and digs up that ground. After drawing people in with the tower of Siloam story and making them think he is on their wavelength, he rips up their foundation with the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard.

First of all, Jesus will not give in to the mentality of, “What horrible people those people must have been for that to happen to them.”

“No, no, no!” Jesus says. *“If you're going to live by reward and punishment then it applies to you as well. You can't have two calculators – one for 'them' and one for 'you.'”*

Jesus tells us the ‘theys’ are no different from us, and we are no different from them. So, if we are not better than ‘them’ – if the circle of sin and brokenness encompasses us and puts us in the same place as ‘them’ – then what hope is there for those of us who live by reward and punishment, cause and effect?

Well actually, NONE. There isn't any hope in reward and punishment.

Our only hope is a different foundation for our lives ... a different ground from which to live.

And Jesus presents that in the parable of the Fig Tree in the Vineyard.

A landowner has planted a fig tree **IN** a vineyard. Now why he would do that is beyond me. A fig tree would soak up water for the vines, cast shade where sunlight is needed. It doesn't belong there. It doesn't fit in. It's not productive to the purpose and mission of the vineyard.

Apparently the landowner thinks life is about more than a business, a reward and punishment type of thing. Why, life might even involve a little pleasure, fun and frivolity in the midst of the daily grind! Why else plant a fig tree in a vineyard?

And if we can make the analogy that the landowner is God and we are the fig tree ... well, it might mean God sees us more as a pleasure than a business.

But then a surprise occurs. No, not in the fact that the tree does not bear fruit. The idea that we disappoint God and don't live up to expectations is nothing new. It's there by the 3rd chapter of Genesis.

And it isn't a surprise that the landowner wants the tree cut down, gone, destroyed. Anyone who lives in the reward/punishment mindset understands that. It's been three years after all. Three years and nothing from the fig tree.

No, the surprise comes in the response of the vinedresser to the landowner when he says, “NO!”

He speaks to the owner of forbearance, forgiveness, and letting the fig tree live by grace. There is probably no clearer picture of Jesus and his ministry than in this parable. And it is important to note that the word for “**Let it be**” is the same word Jesus uses on the cross when he says “Father, **FORGIVE** them.” Forbear them. Let them go on.

And what is particularly interesting is the last line of the vinedresser, “*If it doesn’t bear fruit next year, then YOU can cut it down.*”

Now I’m not sure what this says about God the Father, but I am clear on what it says about God the Son. He will not go back on forgiveness. He will not go back on grace. He will not deal with us on the basis of reward and punishment or getting what we deserve. Not now, not next year, not ever.

And as John 3:35 reads, “*The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in HIS hands.*” So we got that going for us.

So what does all this mean for you and me?

Well, have you ever felt like a fig tree in a vineyard? Have you ever felt out of place, like you didn’t fit in or you can’t measure up?

Have you ever been in middle school and felt like you never got out of it?

Or, have you ever felt like you were in a three-year slump like the fig tree? And I suppose here I should apologize to my boss, Eric, for reminding him of his entire high school baseball career.

Anyway, if you have ever been in a three-year slump, or felt like you didn’t fit in, or felt out of place ... then you’ve come to the right place.

Welcome to the One who will feed you with His body and blood. The One who will pour Himself into you and on you and around you ... so that you will never be alone or out of place.

I want to conclude with a quote from Robert Capon. Mainly because I’ve already plagiarized heavily from him and should probably give him credit. It’s a rather long one, but listen well. I used to not like using long quotes and then a friend of mine said to me, “Look, if you can find someone who can say it better than you, then just shut up and let them say it. And then tell us who it is and where we can find more from them.”

From Robert Capon and his book on the *Parables of the Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*:

“The world lives as the fig tree lives, under the rubric of forgiveness. The world of course, thinks otherwise. In its blind wisdom, it thinks it lives by merit and reward. It likes to imagine that salvation is essentially a pat on the back from a God who either thinks we are good eggs, or, if he knows how rotten we are, considers our repentance sufficient to make up for our unsuitability.

“But by the foolishness of God, that is not the way it works. By the folly of the cross, Jesus becomes sin for us, and he goes outside the camp for us, and he is relegated to the dump for us, and he becomes garbage and compost, offal and manure for us.

“And then he comes to us. The Vinedresser who on the cross said, “Forgive ... forbear” to his Lord and Father comes to us with his own body dug deep by nails and spears, and his own being made dung by his death ... and he sends our roots resurrection.

“He does not come to see if we are good. He comes to disturb the caked conventions by which we pretend to be good. He does not come to see if we are sorry. He knows our repentance is not worth the hot air we put into it. He does not come to count anything. Unlike the lord in the parable, he cares not a fig for any part of our record, good or bad.

“He comes only to forgive. For free. For nothing. On no basis, because like the fig tree, we are too far gone to have a basis. On no conditions, because like the dung of death he digs into our roots, he is too dead to insist on prerogatives.

“We are saved gratis, by grace. We do nothing and deserve nothing. It is all, absolutely and without qualification, one huge hilarious gift...

“The world lives as the fig tree lives, under the rubric of forgiveness.”

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless... Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother... hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

("Our Father", Taize Reflections)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.