

**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 20, 2022**

“Looking for fruit”



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Based on *Isaiah 55, Psalm 63*

Come, everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters. Come to the wells.

Our souls thirst for you, O God.

We lift up our hands and call on your name

Come, without money. Come without cost.
Incline your ears and listen for good news.

Our flesh faints for you, O God.

Our lips sing praises, beholding your glory.

Come, eat good. Come, feast upon true riches.
Be filled with that which sustains you.

Our souls are satisfied in you, O God.

In the shadow of your wings, we sing with joy.

***INVOCATION:**

Author of abundance, God of change, we come into this hour with holy expectations. As we travel on our journey of transformation this Lenten season, we know that you are with us. You walk beside us. Your presence surrounds us. Help us to bear fruit as we walk this road. Remind us that you will never leave us nor forsakes us, that your rod and your staff comfort us, that you have prepared a feast for us when all can come and eat. Keep us forever in the path as we worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION / INVITATION TO CHANGE**

God, you call us to step more deeply into ourselves as we amend and awaken to who you desire us to be. Let us acknowledge our transgressions in stillness and in silence so that may prepare our hearts for change.

Moment of silence

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

We confess that we have not always brought forth good fruit. In the midst of chaos and frenzy, we have often lost our way. Our feet have strayed from the place where we met you. Our egos have kept us from seeing our missteps;

Yet, with you, we know there's another chance for change. There is another opportunity to bear good fruit. In a world full of spoiled and rotten produce, and systems designed to kill we are called to be the change that sustains generations.

Let us lean with you into this chance for transformation.

***WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

God's grace and mercy abounds.

God is with us in the change.

God's everlasting arms embrace us.

Each of us is beloved, affirmed, and set free.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 10:1-6, 9-13

The words of the Apostle Paul

Brothers and sisters, I want you to be sure of the fact that our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all went through the sea. ²All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³All ate the same

spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵ However, God was unhappy with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. ⁶ These things were examples for us, so we won't crave evil things like they did. ⁹ Let's not test Christ, like some of them did, and were killed by the snakes. ¹⁰ Let's not grumble, like some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. ¹¹ These things happened to them as an example and were written as a warning for us to whom the end of time has come. ¹² So those who think they are standing need to watch out or else they may fall. ¹³ No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 13:1-9**

Demand for genuine change

¹ Some who were present on that occasion told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices. ² He replied, "Do you think the suffering of these Galileans proves that they were more sinful than all the other Galileans?" ³ No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you

will die just as they did. ⁴What about those eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think that they were more guilty of wrongdoing than everyone else who lives in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did.”

⁶Jesus told this parable: “A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷He said to his gardener, ‘Look, I’ve come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I’ve never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil’s nutrients?’ ⁸The gardener responded, ‘Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. ⁹Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.’”

These are the ancient Words shared with us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “No figs, many lessons”

It may seem like we have two different lessons in this Gospel passage before us today. However, there is a common theme among them. It is an urgent call to repentance, a turning from sin and a reformation of action and attitude.

Before we go any further, I want to stop and talk about repentance for a moment, so we are all clear on what the word means. It is not just, “I’m sorry I did it and I will try hard not to do it again.” Yes, that is a confession of sin committed or failure to commit. And yes, when we say a prayer of confession, it is followed by the reassurance of pardon, and that’s that. You wipe your hands and walk away, only to do the sin again next week. Saying “I’m sorry” is NOT the same as repentance.

In the HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, the definition of “repentance” takes up a whole page in very tiny print. The most profound notion of repentance is the sense of “reversal”. It is expressed through the Hebrew word *shub*, which expresses the idea of turning back or retracing one’s steps. In the New Testament the idea of repentance as turning to God, is expressed by the Greek verb *metanoein*. This idea doesn’t just mean the concept of changing one’s mind, but also coming to a new way of thinking.

You may recall that John the Baptist preached “Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.” John calls the people to have an authentic conversion. John is not worried about breaking one of the 613 Jewish law in the Torah. John is not worried about buying the correct animal sacrifice for the priests to put on the altar at the temple. John’s

message of repentance is connected to the imminent arrival of God's kingdom and the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus' call to repentance is also loosely linked to the arrival of God's kingdom. His summons to conversion, moreover, is associated with his own person, so that a decision for or against him signifies a choice for or against repentance. Jesus asks us to change our belief system. Don't do things because "we've always done it that way." Do things that Jesus would have us do. That what conversion means in the mind of Jesus.

For another example of repentance, we can look to the Gospel of John. John does not use the word "repentance," but speaks of spiritual transformation as a new birth. So, you see, "spiritual transformation" is certainly more than just "I'm sorry. I'll try not to do it again." From now on, every time we hear the word "repentance", we will know it's a big deal.

Now let's go back to our Gospel lesson for today. In verses 1-5, we hear the people asking Jesus about the people who died in a tragic way, what sin did they commit to be killed.

To me this is a great example of how those people should change their way of thinking. The Jewish people of that time believed that illness, poverty,

disease, loneliness, and death are the punishment for sins known and unknown. Jesus denied that there was any direct correlation between the tragic deaths and sin.

We may remember the story of the blind man in John 9:2. The disciples asked Jesus "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered in the same way; there is no connection between sin and the man's blindness. Another example of repentance as changing your way of thinking. For Christians, the fatal blow to the idea that suffering and death are the lot of the guilty came at Golgotha on the cross. Jesus was without sin but was executed anyway.

The fig tree is given a second chance. Luke's story leaves open the possibility of fruitfulness, and at least a temporary triumph of mercy over judgment. Luke's message here is that there is still time for Israel and all its people to repent and bear fruit, in other words, do some good for others as evidence of that repentance. God's mercy is still talking to God's judgment, and on that conversation hangs our salvation. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer. Save us, God of the living, from any misconception that because we survive and others meet untimely

deaths, that we are more virtuous than they. For proof we just need to look at the innocent people in the Ukraine that are dying through no fault or sin of their own. God of compassion, that you for sending people, food and medicine to the Ukraine. Many who can't go to the Ukraine, help support the mission by way of their monetary gifts.

Heal the sick. Cheer the sad. Relieve the anxious. Give peace of mind to those who are disturbed. Free those who suffer from addiction. God, please call the well-trained people to help all of them. May the rest of us share your love with others in whatever manner we can beginning with praying for all those on our prayer list.

Eternal God, we rejoice in your gracious gathering of a great and blessed company who have inherited your promises and give thanks for the companions of our life's journey. Christ, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be glory and praise, time without end, as we pray your Son's prayer . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but

deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

As we go forth to bear good fruit,
May God be with us in our hunger and thirst.
May our ears be ever inclined, listening for the good news. May praises be on our lips even in the bleakest valley and May the God of peace equip us with every good thing to carry out God's desire for the world.
Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Lynn Hursey, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, John Biehl, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Rich Schmitt, Dorothy Wagner, Granddaughter Captain.

LENTEN STUDY continues on March 23 via Zoom 6:30 pm. If you don't have a computer, you can join us on your phone. The Zoom meeting ID is 878-8123-0951 and the pass code is 651278. The phone number is 1-312-626-6799 and use the same ID and passcode.

