

## Following the Footsteps of Jesus; to the Lakeshore

Shepherd's Grace Church

March 3, 2013

### Luke 13

<sup>1</sup>At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>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 others living in Jerusalem?" <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>So 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?' <sup>8</sup>He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Also Read Isaiah 55: 1-13)

Today as we continue our Lenten journey we move to the Lakeshore. Our Lenten journey so far seems to be rather circular. We started on the side of a hill far removed from the cares and trials of the world. We began there in prayer and teaching. We learned to call God our Father. We moved to the barren desert. There we found no life, only temptation. As we followed Jesus, we learned to resist the evil of the world and even though we are not always effective, we learned we can always turn to God for guidance and strength. From the desert we thought we were moving to a place of safety and sanctuary as we followed Jesus to the synagogue. Instead however, we were confronted there by those who represent the status quo; power, greed, lust and oppression! As we listened to Jesus conversation with those in power we heard his passion, in Greek the word is the same as suffering for Jerusalem! He said, "how I have longed to gather you...but you were not willing!"

In that moment last week, Jesus mission was revealed to us from his own mouth. He is to continue to reach out to the poor, the oppressed, the blind, the sick but there are those who will oppose. The Pharisees represent the opposition. Herod represents the opposition. As we stand in Jesus footsteps there on the steps of the synagogue we recognize the opposition! The world is the opposition. As we follow Jesus, we learn that even our places of worship can be places of opposition when they become too comfortable, too cozy, too concerned with their own welfare and not the welfare of those truly in need.

So today we follow Jesus to the lakeshore. Right now we remember that Jesus has fixed his face on Jerusalem and the fulfillment of his mission there, but as we come to the lakeshore we think perhaps we are here to find some peace. The prophet Isaiah tells us this morning, "all who are thirsty come to the waters." He goes on to say "Here you can buy bread and wine without money. Here you can be satisfied without price!" As we listen to the words of the prophet, we begin to think we can find peace here in this place. Isaiah invites us to listen, to find life in the words of God! This seems like a good place to be! In this moment, in a moment of comfort we are glad we followed Jesus here.

As we rest and refresh ourselves, as we anticipate the meal we are about to share (it is communion Sunday this week in church), we imagine ourselves at the water. Actually, I could not pin down the setting for this particular message of Jesus. I set him along the shores of the sea of Galilee because Isaiah invites us to come to the waters this morning. At the water, I can imagine the message of new covenant as shared by the prophet intersecting the words of Luke's gospel lesson.

But at that very hour, in that very moment when we find peace, once again we hear controversy! Those who are speaking to Jesus this day ask him about the event of terrorism that has taken place in Jerusalem. The first picture you look at this morning is a photo I took when I was in Israel in 2006. Our tour group had arrived in Tiberius the evening before, after dark and I had no idea how close any of the landmarks were in the area. As I went out for a morning run, I left our hotel and not 50 yards away was the Sea of Galilee! The morning was calm, peaceful, still and there was no noise or distraction from the lake. The only thing visible was the tour boat you see in the foreground of the picture. The boat moved easily through the glassy calm waters and barely created even a ripple...at least in my mind.

At that very moment, I realized where I was. I was at the lakeshore, the place where Jesus had called his disciples, the place where He had walked on water, calmed the seas, and later after resurrection, the place where He once again met his disciples for breakfast! A sense of incredible awe and also of incredible calm came over me! The reality of my geography was inspiring, inviting, invigorating! It is this reality to which we come this morning. Today, I invite you to travel to this same lakeshore, take in the scene, experience the footsteps of Jesus! Listen to His words and recognize in His message an invitation filled with truth, yet also filled with irony!

In the midst of your calm, in the midst of your serenity, in the midst of your rest, now come words that must SHATTER your peace! The prophet Isaiah invites us to the water, invites us to drink. The prophet also extends the Lord's invitation to eat for free and drink that which costs us nothing. As we take in these incredible gifts in the calm of the moment the crowd calls out to Jesus! They are indignant! They are even belligerent! Pilate has mingled the blood of Galileans with the blood of the lambs, the blood of the sacrifice! They shout out to entice Jesus, perhaps to enrage him at the atrocity of the act! Clearly they see the act as one of terrorism! They want their leader to respond! They want their leader to incite the crowds that are gathered! They want their leader to act like a leader...at least, the kind of leader they want! How frequently we find ourselves looking for this kind of leader; the leader who will react to the problems we perceive as problems, the leader who will fix our world just the way we want it!

The problem is Jesus is not that leader. The crowds, even the disciples do not yet understand the type of leader Jesus is. It is for this reason Jesus has strictly forbade the disciples from plainly speaking of Him as Messiah! So while the crowd wants Jesus to issue a call to action, Jesus instead urges a far different response. Instead of an outward and all out assault on Pilate, Jesus invites the crowd to consider the truest nature of the act!

Choosing His words very carefully at this point so as to clearly define His mission, Jesus asks, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" I say Jesus chooses His words carefully at this point for two reasons. First, He uses the word suffer, from the Greek word *passio* or *passion*. The word is chosen and is used by Luke only here and in the description of Jesus passion and crucifixion. The suffering described here is by those who have taken up a cause and now have to pay the ultimate price for it. When Jesus hears the crowds ask about those who are victims of a terrorist attack He responds not only to their attack, but to the attack He knows will come upon Him.

On the same day the blood of the Passover Lambs flows out from the temple, the blood of Christ will be mixed with it from the cross. This mingling is a vicious act of terrorism that Jesus knows is being plotted against Him and against the kingdom of God. His mission, as defined in Luke's chapter 4 is to bring the good news to the poor, to cure the lame and the deaf, to restore sight to the blind and even to raise people from the dead! His mission, His righteous reason for confrontation of authority is what spurs the attack from Pilate. It is this same righteous reason that costs the lives of those in rebellion who are referred to in the questions from the crowd. Their suffering, their passion reminds Him of His own!

The second reason for choosing His words carefully is that Jesus wants to be sure to convey the totality of His invitation. He asks if the people who suffer are guilty of greater sin than any others. He asks this same question of those who perish by accident in the falling of the tower at Siloam. What Jesus wants us to think about this morning, what He wants us to be sure we know is that the acts of terrorism or violence, or even of accident are not the fault of the victims. The people who perish in these events are not being punished by God because they are somehow more sinful than others!

Jesus answers His own question and reminds us that God does not carry out God's judgments in a somehow arbitrary manner striking down the guilty at His own capricious whim. What Jesus wants us to know is that we are all sinners, all worthy of judgment, all worthy of total condemnation and therefore all worthy of death. Those who perish in acts of terrorism or violence or accident do not perish because of their own sin, they perish because of the acts of others. They suffer because of the acts of others.

The people who were in the Twin Towers on 9.11 were no more guilty of sin than were any other people in the world that day. The apostle Paul tells us all have sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of God! Those who were in the towers were victims. They will not be judged for the act perpetrated against them. Those who perpetrated the act will be the ones who are judged. By the same token, the child who is victim of violent sexual abuse in her own home will not be judged for her silence and shame. She did nothing to provoke the attack just as the workers in the towers did nothing to provoke the attack that cost them their lives.

The picture I painted for you of the Sea of Galilee this morning, the first one you looked at is a picture of calm and peace. The sea is so glassy smooth that as I saw it I could actually imagine Jesus being able to walk on it. I could imagine it so completely that I went over to the edge and tried to step out on it myself, you know...just to see. The instant my foot hit the water, it did not stay above, but sank into the calm thereby causing ripples, disrupting the calm of the sea and continuing on out into the water. This action only served to remind me of the irony of the peaceful experience of the sea that morning. You see, just the day before arriving in Tiberius, our group crossed over into Jordan. As we crossed the border we crossed aware of the threat of attacks by terrorists on some port of entry that day. The peace I was experiencing this morning had been jarred only the previous day by the threats of others.

This is the world we live in, a world where we walk to work one minute struck by the calm of our surroundings, the world where we go to sleep at night thinking we are safe and protected, the world where we travel to see the places where Jesus walked one minute only to have that world blown apart a second later by the vicious acts of others who rob us of our peace and our rest! This second reason for Jesus' careful choice of His words is to be sure we do not misunderstand God's actions. God will judge our sins; none can escape that judgment, however all will be judged based on their actions, their sins and the way those sins impact the world! That judgment can bear the full force of God's wrath or it can bring the full measure of God's Grace!

“Repent!” Jesus says in verse 3 and again in verse 5! As He says this word, he adds the phrase that reminds us of our judgment. If you fail to repent, you will suffer and perish just as these other victims do. These words might seem curious to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but I believe they would have been clearly understood in the 1<sup>st</sup>! You see, as we read our Bibles in the privacy of our own homes or even in the sanctity of our own space here this morning, we tend to hear sin and repentance in individual terms. We tend to think Jesus is talking to us as individuals and that it is up to us as individuals to confess our own sin and make our own repentance.

First century people of Jesus’ culture would never have considered such an attitude! They would have known that sin was a community problem and repentance is the act of the whole to change the very nature of their existence! When Jesus asks the question of those in the crowd, “are these more guilty than the others,” they would have understood that the sin of one affects the whole. Just as the ripple I created by attempting to walk on the calm waters of the Sea of Galilee created a ripple in the entire lake, so the sin of one affects the entire community.

Because of the actions of Pilate, all are affected! The tolerance of the Romans that existed as long as they let the Jews practice their worship freely and without restriction is now destroyed! This destruction creates a tension that ripples through every other facet of their society. The people who heard Jesus’ words that day would have known that sin affects every aspect of our lives and takes away the freedoms we so dearly want to cling to and cherish!

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we tend to forget that the actions of the one have a deep and lasting impact on the many! We want to believe that we can live our own lives and extend the logic of our own individual privilege to whatever works for us! Our actions have no impact on others and even if by some chance they do...well that is up to them to deal with.

Sin even if only perpetrated by one causes reactions in the creation of all. That fact was, and is the deep devastation of the effect of the actions of Adam and Eve. On Saturday, I attended a seminar talking about Jesus’ work of redemption in the spring festivals outlined in the Bible. One message I took away from that was a renewed understanding of just how deeply God loves us and desires a deep relationship with us. This reminder is the economy of God!

Have you ever considered how much it cost God to create the world; the universe? It cost God nothing to create! God spoke and the world leapt into existence! His authority, his voice brought it all things into being. God looked at all He created and said, “It is good!” God was pleased at his action and delighted in the economy of it! When that which He created disobeyed his only command that which God created, ordered and organized was destroyed. Creation was not destroyed, but creation’s relationship with God was. God’s purpose from that point forward then became reconciliation with God’s original purpose! The cost of that reconciliation could only be accomplished by the willingness of one to take on the sin of all! The only one capable of accomplishing that reconciliation was the one without sin. The cost of creation was nothing, the cost of redemption for God was everything! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only son!” God paid the ultimate price for our existence. He gave everything for us!

The Jesus then who asks us to repent this morning is the cost of redemption. He knows that in order to restore right relationship with God, we must accept a completely new direction in the world. When Jesus asks us to repent, he is not asking us as individuals to repent, He is asking us as a community, as a world to repent! In John 6 Jesus says that His mission is to do the will of God, to gather all that was given to him! Our repentance therefore is not our individual desire to sin no more, but it is our willingness together to change the very way we look at the world. Repentance is not

a turning away from sin, it is a turning toward God! Repentance is a conscious choice made by each of us to put the good of all of us and the glory of God ahead of our own individual desires! Repent Jesus says, or you will all perish!

Now we sit with our peaceful image of the lakeshore shattered! The calm is no more, the ripples become greater. I invite you to look at the second picture I am attaching this day. This is the same lakeshore from approximately the same location, but the picture is taken just a few hours later. Notice the storm clouds brewing! Notice the visibility diminishing! Notice the raindrops starting to fall! This too is the lakeshore we are called to this morning! God invites us not only to the sunshine and the calm, but to the storms and the violence of the sea! Both lakeshores are the reality of our lives and if we follow the footsteps of Jesus, we must experience both! We want the peace and the calm, but we recognize that the storms are a part of our existence!

I have grown up in Kansas where I have witnessed the weather change faster than I could have ever imagined! I have never in all my years here been witness to a storm that rolled in as fast as the one you see in this second picture! In the matter of minutes, the rains fell and the waves began to crash over the sides of the boat and we could hear the people calling from the interior of the boat, crying out for help! They were afraid of perishing! The captain of the boat however, was an experienced captain and he safely guided them back to shore. They had to make several course corrections on the way in but they were able to arrive safely! They did not turn immediately away from the storm, but rather at times had to steer into it to establish their position. Then when they were committed to the correct course they were able to move to where they wanted to be.

Once again I say, repentance is not about turning away from sin, it is about turning toward God! God can be found where we seek Him and those who seek Him diligently will find Him even in the midst of the storm. Repentance requires constant course correction and awareness of the situations life presents us. Storms are often brewing that we never see coming! Our role in the storm is to search for the captain, the one who will guide us safely through. That captain will keep us from death and will care for us until we arrive safely at the shore!

When Jesus tells the parable this morning he invites us to hear it from the lakeshore. We have water, we have food we have all the essentials of life here. Everything we need is before us as the prophet Isaiah has promised. What we have is God's covenant with us. That covenant plants us like a tree in God's garden. In the garden we are cared for and nurtured in the midst of the sunshine and the storms. We weather the seas of life and we rejoice in the calm. We bend in the high winds and parts of us break with the lightening! We do not perish however. We continue to exist.

In the story Jesus wants us to know that one day The Owner will show up. The owner has been around before and has been patient but one day the owner will call the gardener and demand an accounting! Why has the tree produced no fruit The Owner will ask. Cut it down He will demand. Why should it be allowed to waste soil! In that moment, the tree will be defenseless! It will be unable to control its own destiny! It will be absolutely at the mercy of the Owner! There will only be one possible source of salvation for the tree and that is the caregiver, the gardener, the one who might possibly be able to guide it into production and thereby into safety!

Notice at this point what the caregiver, the gardener says to the Owner. Sir the gardener respectfully addresses the owner, give the tree another year. Allow me to tend to it, to cultivate it, to prune it, to feed it properly. If it will receive what I have to give and produce fruit, then well and good. If not, then you can cut it down.

In the parable we are not told how the Owner responds. We are not told if the tree is allowed to live or die. We assume the response because we know the Owner is God and the caregiver (Gardener) is Jesus. We are the tree planted in God's vineyard. We are the ones who have not born fruit. As we hear the story we remember as the people of the 1<sup>st</sup> century would have remembered the words of John The Baptist. "Who told you to flee from the wrath that is to come!" John says in chapter 3. "Bear Fruit worthy of repentance!"

In an instant, at that very hour when we are so outraged along with the crowds at acts of terrorism and torture, when we are so outraged at accidents and lack of accountability we must recognize that we have not born fruit! We, not as individuals, but as the collective branches of the tree God planted, have not been willing to turn toward God in Jesus who is the light of the world and the living water! In that very hour we have found ourselves as the ones who are lacking. Jesus' call for repentance today is a call to the world. It is an invitation to turn not from our sin, but towards God who desires a new heaven and earth, a creation born not of outrage and exile but of care and concern. God's repentance is never from but always to. Bearing fruit is an act of accountability and not a recognition of instability!

In the third picture I am showing you today you see a vineyard in Israel. Notice that in the vineyard, high above the plantings and the presses and the possibilities for fruit is a watchtower. From the watchtower, the owner can see all that is going on. He sees the tree as its branches bring forth leaves and then fruit. He sees how the branches connect to the trunk and most importantly he sees the steadfast dedication, the passion of the gardener who desires the very best for the garden. In Genesis 2 God sets man in the garden to till it and plant it and keep it and be steward over it. The first man fails, but the second man, Jesus comes to complete the assigned task. It is his responsibility, His mission to bring the good news as food to the tree and to let the tree bear fruit worthy of that good news.

The final picture is like the first. It is a picture of calm and still as we look longingly from the lakeshore. In this picture we can remember the storms of our lives and the comfort we found in others in those storms and we can remember how we were guided through by one more wise than ourselves. In this very hour we can give thanks because we have followed the footsteps of Jesus to the lakeshore. Amen!



