

**“Bearing Fruit” – Lisa Martens-Bartel**

**for Osler Mennonite Church March 31, 2019**

Introduction (connections to Osler -Karl/Russ&Lucy)

(farm, exploring calling/nudging... pastoral intern,  
isolated church -love wider church -happily accepted invitation)

Osler practice lent? Major or minor

-I've always liked lent

-wish it was more communal (ex Hassoo's)

I want to start with the scripture as this has been chosen to guide us through lent.

In Luke 13:1-9 it reads like we have 2 texts

1. The first part where Jesus is asked to comment on some tragic current events,
2. A parable Jesus gives about a fig tree given a second chance to be productive.

Quite a few resources dealt with these two parts in separately or who skim over one to get to the other.

But I want to read them as like a set of instructions, with illustrations for each.

Step 1 and Step 2

-These steps teach us behaviour that is fitting to lent/ an invitation to practice lent more than just on Sunday morning.

Step 1:

Jesus is with a group of people being asked to comment on current events (name)  
v.1

-Jesus does not take the bait and point blame v.2-4 (at either victim or victimiser)

## Smile & Go Slow

but instead of railing against the oppressive injustice of Pilate or making a connection between sin and suffering - he instead turns the focus back on the crowd- demanding repentance from them.

-It's kind of Jesus' thing to not answer a question straight on.

He'll either ask more questions or tell a story or turn it back on you

-So instead of talking politics, he turns it onto us. v.5

-It's way easier to talk about what someone else should have or shouldn't do, than to talk about or look at ourselves.

So, the question: "who is to blame -Pilate or did they deserve it?"

-At first glance, I thought "do we even believe that anymore" -original sin

-rain on the good and the wicked

-bad things happen to faithful people and vis versa

-But even if we know it's true in our heads, maybe there's a place deep down inside us all, that space where secrets reside, that wonders, that questions, what did they/I do? Why is this happening to them/me? Could they/I have done something differently? What justifies this suffering?

-This is how we make sense of disaster, devastation, acts of terror or hate, or tragedies. Our attempt to understand.

This can help us (roads, safety standards, medical, etc), but sometimes it's the wrong question. Jesus doesn't answer this question here

We can see this in many places in the gospels where Jesus is asked to comment on politics, on the empire, but he doesn't take the bait.

-ex: Paul in Act in prison (from my class)

-I think we as Christians get sucked into this too easily and don't follow Jesus' example and side step it. We want to use our beliefs of right and wrong to pick a political side. We aren't very good, like Jesus, at avoiding the political blame game and speaking to the heart of the issue.

## Smile & Go Slow

-The gospel is political, but not partisan

That's a whole other sermon, Jesus says "No" This kind of questioning won't get us anywhere.

-we cannot change those deaths, so lets talk about you

Vs.5 NIV "unless you repent you too will perish"

CEB "unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did."

=if you aren't faithful, you have the same fate, so what does it matter if you live long or not

The Greek word for repent is METANOIA = change you core, your centre of being, who you are, no sense of regret or moralistic implication

REPENTANCE meaning?

-when I think of R -think of the image of catholic confession, admitting how and where I have done wrong,

-idea of worthlessness

-not convinced that this is a helpful, productive, faith-giving message

-good to be humble, & confess but it's more than that

-explain these words to girls club...

-repentance is really a chance to change our perspective. It's like a new year's resolution. "I've been sloppy, and now I'll do better."

-R is not a lack of worth, but instead an affirmation of grace, or worthiness - admitting we have deep abiding worth

This is Step 1. Change you hearts and live, or theirs not much point to long lives

## Smile & Go Slow

Step 2.

-Parable of a fig tree

-doesn't produce, owner says cut it down, gardener says give it another chance, I will water and fertilize it.

Allegory - God as the landowner, Christ as the Gardener and we are the fig tree

Let's flush this out. If Christ is the Gardener, then that mean he is giving us the water and the fertilizer. (lots of imagery in bible for that: water/bread of life...)

Us/fig tree: at first glance a fig tree doesn't *do* anything. But does it? ...

-it soaks up the water/fertilizer

-it responds to the care

-it's cells grow and multiply

-it does what a tree is supposed to do, it doesn't figure out a plan or what to do next or how to grow, it just responds to the nourishment.

Maybe we need to be a little more tree like,

-less planning our next move,

-more responding to Christs nourishment

-producing fruit that the Owner/God wants to see

(QUOTE -Faithful Presence)

Doing this... is all about TRUST.

-I'm going to come back to the bearing fruit imagery, but I want to look at the Psalm text (Psalm 63:1-8)

## Smile & Go Slow

1 O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Hot and dry image fits with Judean wilderness, but maybe for our prairie parallel, it should be cold and windy. My soul yearns for your warmth,

2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

3 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. 5 My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips 6 when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

7 for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

All of the Psalmist faculties are in the service of drawing near to God.

-Hot/dry or cold/windy = spiritually far from God

-Being close to God is like eating a rich feast (comfort food on a cold day)

-This is the model of spiritual devotion

-This is what Lenten disciples are seeking to cultivate in preparation for Easter.

All throughout the Psalms there is an ongoing theme of Trust in God.

-Here when we trust in God is like coming in from the cold to a hot pot of chili.

This is what it feels like to trust and be near God.

A plant has no other option but to trust its gardener.

(I may have an affinity to imagery about gardeners)

And our gardener is the master gardener! He knows exactly what we need, we just have to listen. We are given the grace, that is not earned, it is a gift.

-And to fully accept this gift of Christ's attention on our lives, we need to trust that God to take control -to listen to God's lead.

Lent is that perfect time to listen.

-Lent encourages us to take a solemn look at our lives.

## Smile & Go Slow

- Lent encourages us to make a critical inventory of ourselves.
- That's where the giving up something for lent comes from.
  - community practice sacrifice
    - It's a chance to look at what is bearing fruit in our lives and remove things that are not bearing fruit or giving life, and replace them with things that are. (should not be a diet plan)

I don't do something every year for Lent, just when I can think of something that will be meaningful -or fruit bearing you could say.

This year my family gave up screen time (ok -just weekdays, but I needed a compromise if I was foisting this upon unwilling participants.)

- Screen time was taking over our evenings (fights, frustration, etc.)
- kids did not like this idea(tears) (now have passwords on computers)
- now 3.5 weeks in, I'm not getting any more done, except that we have quality time together, we have played many board games, bicycles, tapped maple trees
- Very happy with this pruning of screen time, to allow other fruit to bloom

*(When I explained this to my Assyrian Iraqi friends, they didn't understand...)*

In lent, in this lead up to Easter, we are invited to remind ourselves of Jesus' 40 days he spent fasting in the wilderness; to examine our priorities, to turn our focus back onto God, to prepare our soul for service to God.

- I extend that invitation to you, to take an introspective look at what is lifegiving and fruit bearing
- you can just open your calendar, see what your energies go to
- what is fruit bearing and what should we repent or turn away from.

True repentance is not just doing this on a personal level, but it goes beyond -to household, to communities, to churches.

## Smile & Go Slow

What would it look like for the church (our church) to look at itself, to affirm what is life giving, to give permission to prune away things that are no longer fruit bearing? (ex. Other MC -got rid of all committees/positions)

Huge Trust!... What fruit would we bear?...

God wants a relationship with us that is not **transactional**. =meaning we do things to that God will do good to us, or vis versa

God wants a relationship that is not **transactional**, but rather wants a relationship that is **transformative**. = Jesus wants us to be willing/trusting enough to be transformed =then we can transform the world around us.

(Like step 1 -repent and step 2 -transform)

God is not like a dog trainer -to obey or be rewarded/punished

God is like a Gardener, who wants us to take up the provided nourishment, and grow and thrive.

I invite you to look at yourself like this fig tree in this parable, how can we take up the nourishment that Jesus is offering, are will filling our time/lives with things/activities/attitudes that are not bearing good fruit?

What kind of fruit are you bearing -individual, household or church?

Will we trust God to tend to us, nourish us, and prune us, to transform us?

We are invited to change our ways, to bear fruit, to trust Christ to be our gardener.

It is my prayer for myself, and my prayer for you as well. Amen.