



3/24/19 Lk. 13: 1-9 & Ex. 3: 1-8a, 13-15

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Fr. Robert Beck ([subscription](#))

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

The remains of the tower pictured here give a hint of fate of those it fell upon. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time has always caused people to doubt their control over the forces in life. Had Jesus been there when the mud slides hit CA this month, some would ascribe it to the sinful lifestyle of those living there. But Jesus urges discretion before making judgments and uses the fig tree as an example. He invites us to “dig” deeper into the cause of things. He suggests that extra care needs to be given before giving up. This Lent offers another opportunity to do some hoeing and fertilizing so that we can bear good fruit.

LUKE 13:1-9

1 At that time some were present who told Jesus about the **Galileans** whose **blood Pilate** had mixed with their **sacrifices**. 2 He said in reply: "Do you think that these **Galileans** were the greatest **sinners** in **Galilee** just because they **suffered** this? By no means! 3 But I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you **reform**. 4 Or take those eighteen who were killed by a falling **tower** in **Siloam**. Do you think they were more **guilty** than anyone else who lived in **Jerusalem**? 5 Certainly not! But I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you begin to **reform**."

6 Jesus spoke this parable: "A man had a **fig tree** growing in his **vineyard**, and he came out looking for **fruit** on it but did not find any. 7 He said to the **vine dresser**, 'Look here! For **three years**

now I have come in **search** of **fruit** on this **fig tree** and found none. **Cut it down**. Why should it **clutter** up the ground?" 8 In answer, the man said, 'Sir, leave it another year while I **hoe** around it and **manure** it; 9 then perhaps it will bear **fruit**. If not, it shall be **cut down**.'"

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Lent is a time for digging and hoeing so that the new growth has a weed free place to emerge. How are you doing in preparing your soul soil for the new that God is preparing for you this Easter?

PRAYER: Gardener Jesus, you know how much work it takes to encourage fruitfulness. You are patient and skillful in guiding me to whatever I need in order to awaken me to a full life in faith. In those times when I or others are tempted to give up on me, help me to remember these words of yours today. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

GALILEE / GALILEANS: Galilee was in northern Israel and was the site of many important trade routes. Its population consisted of people of mixed ancestry, and therefore looked down on by those of "pure blood". No one or nothing good (see John 1:46 and 7:52) was thought to come from such a place. It was where Jesus spent most of his three years of ministry.

What does this information tell me about the sincerity of the question posed to Jesus? Who would be my modern Galileans? Have I ever been a "Galilean"? How did it feel?

BLOOD: Blood was thought to contain the life force of a being. It was sacred, and offered only to God in a sacrifice. Those wanting purity of sacrifice would have thought it a sacrilege that the blood of sinful "Galileans" contaminated their sacrifices. They were trying to pin Jesus down on why bad things happen to good people.

Why do I think Jesus answered his questioners in the way he did? Do I think they got what they hoped for? If not, why? If so, why?

PILATE: Pilate was a ruthless lackey of Rome, who was hated and feared by all. He allowed pagan symbols to be introduced into the temple knowing full well the insult that would be to the people. This tipped off a riot that caused the nearby tower to fall on many in the streets. People couldn't make sense out of this, because they believed that God rewarded good people and punished bad people. In defending the purity of the temple they believed they were very good.

Can I identify with the questioners? What things cause me to question basic beliefs about God?

SACRIFICE: People sacrificed things to God, believing that this would encourage God to continue to bless them with further goods. It was also a way of recognizing that God is the source of all life and all that makes life possible.

During this lent, how am I responding to the gift of my life? Do I take time to remember that every breath I take is a gift of God?

SUFFERED: To suffer something is to allow it into your life, even though you may not want it there. It may come as a consequence of loving and caring. It may be just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The people wanted to avoid suffering and therefore were anxious to know why this tragedy happened.

How does this incident challenge me? Do I like or dislike Jesus' response? Why?

REFORM: To reform is to re-form. That is to make something into a new reality.

How does Jesus' response to the questions challenge the people to re-form their thinking? Does this give them a chance to see God in a new way? How? Why?

TOWER: A tower was erected near a border to enable people to see far off and warn of any impending threat.

What does this example say about the people's ability to see? Did their limited range of understanding about God become the threat itself?

SILOAM: Siloam was the site of an underground source of water that enabled the people inside the walls of Jerusalem to withstand long periods of siege from outside invaders.

What underground source of "water" do I have that enables me to withstand the periods of siege in my life? Can this lent help me find those underground sources of life giving water? How?

GUILTY: Our search for guilt is motivated by many things. It helps us to re-form our behavior/ideas, as well as identify those, which need re-forming.

What needs identifying and reforming in my life this lent? Can this healthy guilt be a lifesaving thing?

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem served as the opposite example of Galilee. It was where the temple and all that symbolized God in the world resided.

What was Jesus doing when he juxtaposed Galilee with Jerusalem? What point was he making? Where is my modern day Jerusalem?



FIG TREE: The fig tree was a valuable part of the food source of Jesus' day. (See information below) It is mentioned over sixty times in scripture. It was often used as a symbol for Jerusalem. *What are the "fig trees" of our day? What is taking up a lot of room, water, and nutrients in my life? Is it producing fruit? If not, what am I going to do about it?*

VINEYARD: The vineyard was an important part of the life in Jesus' time as well. Jesus often uses it as a symbol of God's place of work in his parables.

How does this parable help me to understand Jesus' God?

FRUIT: Fruit is another favorite example Jesus uses in his teachings about God. It is the way we can use to judge the health of our faith life.

What fruit am I bearing these days?

VINEDRESSER: Often the vinedresser is the symbol for God. The vinedresser was the one who planted and cared for the vineyard and vines.

What is Jesus saying about God in this parable? Does this comfort or confront me?

THREE YEARS: Three years was the length of Jesus' ministry.

What do I think Jesus meant when he used this time frame for the parable?

SEARCH: To search is to go out looking for something or someone. It implies a concentrated effort.

What do I think Jesus was searching for in this parable?

CUT IT DOWN: To cut down the fig tree is to give up on it and to make way for something else to be planted.

What other examples of God "cutting down" can I remember from the Hebrew Scriptures? Are there any ideas or behaviors that need cutting down in my life this lent?

CLUTTER: To clutter is to crowd a space with unnecessary items.

What is cluttering my faith life these days?

HOE: A hoe is a tool that is used to work up the soil in a garden. It also is used to eliminate weeds.
What are the tools I have to work up the soil of my faith garden? Do there any weeds need eliminating?

MANURE: Manure is the waste product of animal life. It is used to fertilize new plant life.
What "manure" is produced in my life these days that can fertilize new life if used properly?

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

"Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your imperfections but instantly set about remedying them – every day begin the new task." - Francis de Sales

Every other creature in nature is simply itself, without this discord which is our constant lot. That is why we can study everything else in nature much more surely than we can study ourselves. With ourselves, all we have to go on is an occasional glimpse of some small part of the truth, and we must be content with that, knowing that we are truly known by Him who alone knows us.
Paul Tournier (1898-1986), "The Meaning of Persons"

Repentance is much different. Unlike regret that comes from within the loving person, repentance usually comes as a summons from without. Repentance challenges us to see where we did not bother to strive, to grow, to love, Unlike regret, which usually is about those areas of our lives where we are weak, repentance addresses those areas where we are strong, specifically; where we could have bothered, where we were able. In the strong areas of our lives the call to repentance asks, Could we have tried more or better?...The difficulty we have with this notion of strengths is that precisely where we are strong in precisely where we think we have no need for God's mercy, and likewise, this is precisely where we do not bother to see whether there is anything lacking. P-102
Harrington, Daniel –Keenan, James [Jesus and Virtue Ethics](#). NY. Sheed & Ward Book. 2002.

Luke 13: 1 mentions "the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices," but this refers either to the aqueduct riot (according to [Josephus –Jewish War 2. 177-](#) , some Jews were clubbed to death; others were trampled by their fleeing companions) or to some mishap occurring during Pilate's administration, for which the government would inevitably receive blame. Note that when Jesus comments on this bloody episode, he does not fault Pilate but puts the event in the same category of accident as the collapse of the tower of Siloam, which killed 18 innocent bystanders Lk. 13: 1-5. Maier, Paul L. [Pilate in the Dock](#). Bible Review. 6/2004. Pg. 28

The English mystic Dame Julian of Norwich (1343-1416) imagines Christ as a gardener. In [Christ the Gardner](#) by Kim Coleman Healy we find "Christ the gardener, whose curse once withered a fig tree, now turns the soil over and over to make the barren tree of humanity fruitful". Lk. 13: 6-9. Parabola, Spring 2001. Pg. 76.

The Pool of Siloam, where Jesus sent the blind man to be healed, was located in the Tyropoeon Valley, at the lower end of Hezekiah's underground conduit (Siloam Tunnel) which brought water into the city from Gibon Spring (Virgin's Fountain). "The gently flowing waters of Shiloah" (Is.8:6) referred to these waters that flowed through the 1770-foot tunnel and into this pool, called Siloam because it was just across the Kidron Valley from the village of Siloam. The pool was much-used by the people of Jerusalem, who considered it sacred.

The excavations undertaken here in 1896-97 by the Palestine Exploration Fund traced 34 steps down to the pool. The main part of this stairway was built of hard, well-jointed stones laid on a bed of stone chips and lime mortar, but the other portion of the stairs was cut from the natural rock and the treads were "well-polished by foot wear." The outline of the ancient pool showed it to be more than twice the size of the present pool.

Excavators also found well-preserved ruins of a doomed church constructed here in the fifth century by Empress Eudocia, and the ruins of a monastery which had been built in the eleventh century. The tower of Siloam, which collapsed and killed eighteen people, was in this general area (Lu. 13:4), but no certain traces of it have been found.



Fig trees were valued for their fruit and their shade, and were used as a symbol of security and prosperity. It was often planted in a vineyard, and if allowed to grow its full height it could reach thirty feet, but if it was on rocky soil or was cut back regularly it could be limited to a bush. It did take up a lot of water and nutrients from the soil, therefore, if unproductive, needed to be cut down. The figs could be eaten fresh or pressed into cakes and preserved by drying, making it a valuable food commodity.

This fig tree (at left) known as Sri Maha Bodhi is located in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. Planted c. 288bce, it is at 2295 years the oldest living human planted tree in the world. This sacred tree brought to Sri Lanka by the daughter of Emperor Asoka, grew from a cutting from the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment in both Gaya, India, in 577 bce. Parabola Fall 1907. Pg. 128.

The tower in question seems to be a structure built by using money designated for the temple. When Pilate allowed his soldiers to bring pagan symbols into the temple, a riot sprang out, and a nearby tower collapsed. Luke has the tower located at Siloam, but scholars are divided as to which of the several pools might be the correct one. Towers were used as part of the fortification of the city.

Jesus and his intimate circle of disciples were on their way from Bethany to pray in the temple when they passed a fruitful fig tree. Jesus used the occasion to say, “Blessed is the fig tree that bears an abundant harvest of figs as rich as these. Life, my friends, is like a fig tree.”

“Yes, you must care for it, making sure it has proper soil and water. Sometimes you must help it to be fruitful by surrounding it with good, pungent manure!” The group laughed, Jesus joining them.

“Personally, Master,” joked Simon Peter, “as a fisherman I prefer the smell of fish to manure. Perhaps, if I were a farmer like Simon of Cyrene here...”

“Dead fish,” said Simon from Cyrene, “make good manure as well, Simon. So regardless of where you obtain your manure – use it, and not just animal dung or decaying fish, but suffering and the other things in life that stink to high heaven.”

Joanna pinched her nose with her thumb and forefinger, saying, “I can’t stand suffering or foul-smelling situations.

“It’s what you do with them,” said Jesus, “that matters. You can use them as manure to make you grow or you can simply suffer their stinging presence – or worse yet, you can spend your life raging against them. Life has its share of foul-smelling situations; it’s what you do with them that counts.” Hays, Edward. *The Gospel of Gabriel*. Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. 1996. Pages 216-217.

Flavius Josephus

Josephus on Pontius Pilate and the Aqueduct Riots

Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.175-177

"On a later occasion he provoked a fresh uproar by expending upon the construction of an aqueduct the sacred treasure known as Corbonas; the water was brought from a distance of seventy kilometers. Indignant at this proceeding, the populace formed a ring round the tribunal of Pilate, then on a visit to Jerusalem, and besieged him with angry clamor.

He, foreseeing the tumult, had interspersed among the crowd a troop of his soldiers, armed but disguised in civilian dress, with orders not to use their swords, but to beat any rioters with cudgels. He now from his tribunal gave the agreed signal.

Large numbers of the Jews perished, some from the blows which they received, others trodden to death by their companions in the ensuing flight. Cowed by the fate of the victims, the multitude was reduced to silence."

"He spent money from the sacred treasury in the construction of an aqueduct to bring water into Jerusalem, intercepting the source of the stream at a distance of thirty-five kilometers. The Jews did not acquiesce in the operations that this involved; and tens of thousands of men assembled and cried out against him, bidding him relinquish his promotion of such designs. Some too even hurled insults and abuse of the sort that a throng will commonly engage in.

He thereupon ordered a large number of soldiers to be dressed in Jewish garments, under which they carried clubs, and he sent them off this way and that, thus surrounding the Jews, whom he ordered to withdraw. When the Jews were in full torrent of abuse he gave his soldiers the prearranged signal.

They, however, inflicted much harder blows than Pilate had ordered, punishing alike both those who were rioting and those who were not. But the Jews showed no faint-heartedness; and so, caught unarmed, as they were, by men delivering a prepared attack, many of them actually were slain on the spot, while some withdrew disabled by blows. Thus ended the uprising."

I don't think the important thing is to be certain about answers nearly as much as being serious about the questions. When we hold spiritual questions, we meet and reckon with our contradictions, with our own dilemmas; and we invariably arrive at a turning point where we either evade God or meet God. Mere answers close down the necessary struggle too quickly, too glibly, and too easily. When we hang on the horns of dilemmas with Christ—between perfect consistency and necessary contradictions—we find our self in the unique place I call “liminal space.” Reality has a cruciform shape to it then—and we are taught best at the intersection of order and disorder, where God alone can make sense out of the situation and we must surrender. All real transformation of persons takes place when we're inside of such liminal space—with plenty of questions that are open to God and grace and growth. Richard Rohr

"The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater." —J.R.R. Tolkien from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle C* 2012. Pgs.60-64

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2007. Pgs. 62-65.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2010. Pgs. 53-56.

