



“A WORLD OF CONSEQUENCES”

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 13:1-9

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, March 23, 2025, Lent #3

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Luke 13:1-9

13:1 At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 13:2 He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 13: 3 No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. 13:4 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 other people living in Jerusalem? 13:5 No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did." 13:6 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. 13:7 So he said to the man working the vineyard, '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?' 13:8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 13:9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.'"

The third gate of grief: the sorrow of the world

We carry the grief of the world within us whether we are conscious of that or not. Some are more aware, more unfiltered, some manifest it in different ways. You have your own unique way—that is deeply embodied, not chosen or intentional, but a consequence of the way we are made. We lived in a shared psyche, a shared reality, a collective unconscious, a web of deep and unbreakable connection.

We are all feeling the world and the world is feeling us—relational, entangled, interdependent. If you are reading along in Frances Weller's book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, you noticed all the different ways he tries to describe our interdependence with all that is. The Soul of the world, Earth grief. We carry the sorrows of the world in our bodies—our cries come from the land, from humans across the world, from animals and water, from all that is.

His question is around our willingness to make space for this truth about us through the space we give for grief. Is your heart willing to stay open to the world? Then finding ways to collectively express and process the sorrows of the world is imperative to our survival and our well being as the human family.

Passage is a call to repentance—the time is short—make every effort at healing, at right relationship, or calamity is assured.

Bloodshed in Pilate's regime was not unusual. There were riots because of his actions, he ordered groups killed simply because of their practice of religion, he stole funds from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct. Pilate had a reputation for quickly choosing the violent solution to try to make a problem go away.

Jesus says the consequences of the brokenness of the human family will come to pass—they are unavoidable in a cause and effect kind of way.

Think of it like the laws of physics. The universe does behave in predictable ways—and shows a preference for certain tendencies, toward more complexity and disorder. But there is evidence that these preferences can change, as different kinds of force impact things.

I'm not saying Jesus was a physicist, but he was sort of a metaphysicist—he was a wisdom teacher, one who understood the tendencies of cause and effect, and how things tend to move toward more and more entropy—or disorder. This kind of complexity is the condition of possibility for life.

And so wisdom teachers have sought clarity about how humans impact the cause and effect of the universe. We add to the complexity, but there is an interesting moral variable that humans bring to the tangle of how life unfolds. We can destroy things and we can create things. We can, through practice, change the way we participate in certain exchanges of visceral data.

Don't try to comprehend all this with your brain, but breathe into what you know about relationships and repair. Let your sentient self remember, recall a time when a moment shifted, when something was coming apart and then it began to rearrange itself into something more life-giving, more vivid, complex and conducive to variety and novelty and creativity.

The hurricane is an immediate example—the disorder and complexity that it created by destroying and rearranging things created the conditions for some new social arrangements. Some of what was is gone in the form and relationship in which it existed,

but what remains then created the conditions for what has emerged, and some of what has emerged tends toward Beauty—not a static quality, but a value that emerges from the ways things relate and react to one another. And intensity that comes from deep harmony, relationships that feed complexity in ways that harmonize, not destroy.

Beauty with a capital B unfolds not in sameness, but in contrast. Resistance creates contrast. Repentance creates contrast. Resistance and repentance can shift the tonality of the way things are reacting to each other.

Standing up, moving in a different direction, adding to the chemistry experiment with some different variables, can create the conditions for more growth, more mutual enhancement, more Beauty.

Jesus in this passage is disrupting the common view of his time that calamity was caused by sin and therefore a punishment. Jesus is asking the obvious question—then why would some sinners die and others not, even those whose sins may have been greater.

This is a misguided understanding. Life is life—it includes calamity, it includes consequences, and it includes death—that will always come as a result of causes and conditions, but calamity and tragedy are not caused by an outside force, but by the ways causes and conditions arise and impact each other. And our disposition toward these things can have an impact on the way things unfold from here.

Jesus compares the deaths that were an atrocity and the deaths that were a sheer accident—they are both a tragedy and provide a warning—any of us could die suddenly without warning and so we need to prioritize right relationship and repentance today! Don't wait! Today is when you can add to the causes and conditions that give rise to what unfolds from here in a way that can offer contrast, offer some balancing force, even maybe change the course of how things unfold.

The fig tree is given another year—not a long time

The fig tree is given another chance –get the message that time is short. Give the fig tree the nutrients it needs, not just on the surface, but deep in its root system and in the soil it lives in, and it has a chance to bear fruit.

Giving ourselves to the sorrow that the current state of the world elicits fertilizes something different than destruction and deprivation.

Evil is privation, the lack of something, the loss of vitality, of complexity, of a harmonic contrast.

Beauty amplifies harmonic contrast. Grief is the contrast to privation, to the lack. Grief is love—and love is the fertilizer of Beauty—not aesthetic Beauty, but the energetic Beauty that amplifies the life-giving potential of things—of roots, of connections, of relationships, of art, of memory, of laughter, of joy, of the Soul in which we all live and move and have our being. Not letting ourselves embody the sorrow in ways that enhance our connections, our shared humanity, adds to the trivializing impact of evil. Evil deprives and erases complexity, evil devalues and suppresses. Evil is the violation of our maximum capacity for intense harmony. Evil decreases contrast, and moves toward stasis.

If the United States of America is the fig tree, it's on its last chance. It's already gotten other chances—and all the conditions were ripe for us to bear fruit. But yet, we have not lived up to our potential for bearing healthy fruit that could nourish.

We are in the midst of a sobering and grotesque reckoning. Either we get into our root system with some of the best manure there is in the world and get some nutrients deep into the soil of this country, we will be cut down.

That is cause for sorrow, and for sober and strategic right action. Turn around, Jesus said, because the time is growing short in which the opportunity to bear fruit will still be viable.

How do we meet the deprivation of evil we are experiencing with the metaphysical and moral force required for the universe to tend toward Beauty, toward maximum harmonization—toward the conditions of life that include contrast and diversity and harmonic resonance?

In this moment, our contribution can be the truth of tears, the truth of lament, the truth of narratives that we refuse to erase, the truth of our shared humanity—which finds expression in our capacity to feel what is happening—not by othering it or smothering it, but by acknowledging it and expressing it.

The sorrows of the world that we feel are the threads of our deep connection, the ways you are feeling it are evidence that we are all connected. The heaviness, the tears, the anxiety, the exhaustion, the disorientation—that is evidence of the fact that our cellular connection with strong, that our shared life-force still has a pulse.

This shared sorrow is fertilizer for what unfolds from here. It's our best chance to bear fruit. Cruelty has consequences—and creates its own chain of reactivity and deprivation. Compassion and courage have consequences, too, and they create impact and nutrition, instead of deprivation.

In a world of consequences, we as people of faith are continuing the quest to create the conditions for all people to thrive, for the arc of the universe to bend toward mutual liberation, for deprivation to be answered with the provision of nutrients that feed vitality and well-being for all.

Evil is making a forceful push right now—and we can feel the deprivation, the loss, the gut punch that comes from inhumanity injecting poison into our shared reality and into our systems of nutrition and mutual aid.

We can feel the deprivation as it mixes with the sorrow we already felt from the hurricane we are still recovering from.

We can feel the deprivation as it mixes with the generational trauma we carry, from the losses we experience in the normal course of human life—loss of loved ones, loss of home, loss of identity, loss of purpose, loss of direction—the things that we all face as our lives unfold.

We feel the deprivation of this push that evil is making—and we see it in the images of human beings being humiliated in an El Salvadoran prison, in the images of fires burning 100s of acres of forest in Western North Carolina. We see it in the gaslighting of propaganda being churned out in the chilling optics of an executive order to close the Department of Education being signed to take away protective measures for children in our public schools with children staged at desks signing their own copies. We see it in the pictures of people around the world impacted by the stoppage of important medical research and shipments of medications.

This evil has consequences—and we feel them in our bodies, in our relationships, in our sleep, in our sense of belonging, in our sense of possibility.

And our participation in this time of deprivation has consequences, too. How we answer this moment has an impact. This is not just about what happens in the branches of our crumbling government, but what happens in our hearts, our collective soul. How do we fertilize the root systems of our shared humanity, how do we provide nutrients to what gives us the best chance to bear fruit?

When a reckoning comes so also comes disorder—and the universe knows how to use disorder to make things happen. Deprivation does not feel life, it is not the path to more complexity.

We can use our energy not to sit in disbelief, but to recognize the moment of truth we are in. The first rule of moral progress is to hold on to our shared humanity. And in this moment, one emblem of our shared humanity is our shared sorrow—our capacity to see what is wrong and dangerous and destructive about what is happening. And in this moment, another emblem of our shared humanity is in our shared resistance.

This depriving force is, in the long run, weak. It has an impact, but it will not last. The tendency of the universe is toward Beauty—an intense and nourishing harmonizing of the family of things. Beauty has a depth and breadth that lasts and finds ways to flower and bear fruit.

Our shared grief and our shared dream of a better world have consequences. Don't give up on the power of Beauty to draw the universe toward its own realization.

(some act in the moment of seeing each other, of honoring each other, of sharing truth, of answering the deprivation with provision—provide each other with some fertilizer right now—support, acknowledgement, encouragement).

Our shared sorrow is a tool of liberation just like our shared values and our shared vision. Soak into the fertilizer of beloved community in these days of deprivation. Our world needs us to still see the potential for us to bear fruit together.

Thanks be to God.