



**The Third Sunday of Lent (C)**  
**March 7, 2010**  
**Luke 13:1-9**  
**The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato**

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Two people had been friends for years. They had once been choir members together in a great Episcopal choir where they shared in magnificent music oftentimes accompanied by brass and other instruments. They each moved away but continued to be in communication. They were good friends. They shared their faith and its importance in their lives for years.

Finally, they decided that one would visit the other, and with great anticipation, they proceeded to set up the reunion complete with several parties for the visitor. The visitor's popularity was immediately evident and caused a great rift between the two. They parted amidst anger and hostility and didn't talk again for some time.

Finally, the visitor broke the ice and called, profusely apologized for any wrong doing, but was roundly 'not' forgiven. Hurt and tears passed but the wound would never heal. No forgiveness. No opportunity for reconciliation, understanding, reconnection. Life would be forever changed because forgiveness simply wasn't in the cards. There was no 'second chance.'

The Gospel today, at least the second half of the Gospel, is really about a second chance. It is the parable of the fig tree, a parable that seemingly overshadows the first half of the passage. The images are easily grasped but they are not insignificant in light of the previous verses.

In those verses, it is clear that Jesus is confronted by those who believed that bad things happen to people for a reason, that there is some kind of just connection, that some suffer a much worse fate than others because they are greater sinners and deserve it. Indeed, that was the prevailing belief of the time, but Jesus said that all people are equal in the sight of God and share equally in the need to repent and ask for forgiveness whether they are great sinners or not.

Paul tells us that "no testing has overtaken anyone that is not common to everyone. God is faithful and will not let us be tested beyond our strength." Well, I wonder if all our sisters and brothers in Haiti and Chili would agree with that.

In the most recent Episcopal Monthly, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti had profound words to say. Trinity Cathedral and many if not all the Episcopal churches in Port au Prince were either destroyed or significantly damaged. There's a powerful photo in the edition with Bishop Jean Zache Duracin and Bishop Katherine Jefferts Shore standing in front of a great pile of stone rubble, the former magnificent Episcopal Cathedral of Haiti.

I don't normally quote so extensively in a homily but I found Bishop Duracin's comments truly amazing in the article he wrote entitled, Lenten Reflection:

“As for resources, we have next to nothing. The wreckage is beyond imagination. However, this situation delivers us into faith. I look at this as a baptism. We who are still alive have had the blessing of survival, but in many ways we have died to the ways of the past. We have the opportunity to rise up and start anew. In this moment of grief and mourning, life must continue.”

He goes on to say:

During this Lenten season, it is important for us in Haiti to turn inward and rediscover all that is just within us. It is imperative that we be reborn in this moment. We will live without the physical trappings of the church because we still have the same spiritual guidance, the confessions, the conversations, the reflection. We look forward to Easter...We give glory to God. We sing within the church of the world. We celebrate life with the same spirit we were given it. In the middle of all the death, there is a God of love and of life, and we must shout ‘Alleluia’ with the living.” *The Episcopal Monthly*, 3/2010.

There is no blame of God. There is no accusing God of unjust treatment of the already poor Haitian people. There is no sense whatsoever that Bishop Duracin believes that his people were treated any differently than any other people anywhere else in the world. What remarkable faith! What remarkable forgiveness! What remarkable love of God, a God who most surely wept on January 12 and continues to weep for the suffering of the people of Haiti and elsewhere in the world.

The Bishop declared that those who are “still alive have had the blessing of survival.” They have been given another chance, a second chance. They could choose to blame God and feel sorry for themselves, or they can embrace “the opportunity to rise up and start anew.” Isn’t that what happens in our relationships with one another and with God when we confess that we are in need of forgiveness, the need for a second chance, the need to be allowed to start again, pull ourselves up, rise and begin again?

Can you see examples of this in your own life? Can you see past brokenness, past inability to forgive even though we have been forgiven by God over and over again? I certainly can. I certainly can spot too many times in my life when I have been unable to forgive, unable to see beyond my own brokenness, unable to let go and unable to forgive.

Some of us carry the weight of harboring anger, hostility, jealousy, or an inability to forgive throughout our entire lives. How terrible! What a burden! What an unnecessary cross when there are so many other challenges in life that are so much more deserving of our energy and attention!

How can we learn to forgive others and to forgive ourselves? We need to rise up and begin again, so that we can be like Jesus, the one who gave his life for the forgiveness of sins? Jesus truly believed that sins can be and are forgiven by God and that we are to do the same.

Our lives are like the fig tree that was given another chance, another chance to grow and thrive. God gives us that chance over and over again. Our challenge is to say that we’re sorry, ask for forgiveness, and start again. May God open our eyes to the forgiveness and reconciliation that is ours so that we can forgive others and be reconciled with them and with God. Amen.