



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 20 March 2022

Lent 3

As we continue to journey with our Lord through the season of Lent, let us leave behind all distractions to focus fully on his presence and word in our worship.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Sir, let it alone for one more year."

Luke 13:8a

An Illustration to set the scene

In 2013 a tornado scorched a seventeen-mile path through a heavily populated area of Oklahoma.

Twenty-five people died, four hundred more were injured and many homes were significantly damaged.

Mikey McManus was one of a five-strong team who made television programmes. When they heard about the disaster they postponed filming and travelled to the area to help the relief effort.

They worked in extreme heat, in a haze of dust.

Mikey said the experience was life-changing, particularly meeting Christian volunteers:

“I used to view all religious people as ignorant,” he said, “but that week taught me who was really ignorant. I saw an outpouring of love from volunteer after volunteer – all Christians. We became friends with people who devote their entire lives to helping others in God’s name. They also helped us with food and a place to stay. And I couldn’t have imagined how much I’d get out of helping others.”

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Nothing hits the headlines like death and disaster: the collapse of a bridge, a motorway pile-up, the shock of a terrorist atrocity.

Such events can be as bewildering as they are distressing.

We can feel powerless at the sudden loss of life and find ourselves reeling with big questions.

As Jesus journeys towards Jerusalem, he is told about two catastrophes.

First, a group of Galilean worshippers at the Temple were massacred under the orders of Pontius Pilate.

Their blood mingled with that of the sacrifices they were offering.

Then a tower in Siloam collapsed, causing eighteen fatalities.

Jesus responds by posing the question he recognises is already in his newsbearers’ minds.

Did these people die as punishment for their sins?

As an explanation it would have reinforced his listeners’ beliefs, and would not have been unexpected from the mouth of a rabbi who preached repentance and judgement.

Yet Jesus does not give any justification for these deaths, but turns his attention to the living, his listeners, whose track record of sin is on a par with those whose loss they are lamenting.

Jesus urges his listeners to repent and submit to the rule of God's kingdom.

As an oppressed nation, they would not be delivered by the violent overthrow of the governing empire, but by the redeeming love of their suffering servant king.

To continue to seek freedom through force would be to put themselves on a pathway to dire consequences.

Within a generation, an unrepentant Jerusalem would see their city's destruction after being besieged in AD70.

Here, as in Matthew's Gospel (26:52), Jesus warns that those who insist on living by the sword will die by it.

The parable of the fig tree brings the message home.....

For three successive seasons the tree has produced no fruit. Its owner declares that the tree should be cut down and its soil reclaimed.

The gardener accepts this, but pleads for one more season of nurture to encourage its fruit.

Like the tree, Jesus suggests that God's people are being granted an opportunity to repent and align themselves with God's will.

But such grace will end in an ultimate reckoning.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

When we hear bad news, we can find ourselves at a crossroads in how we choose to respond.

We can be paralysed by fear, aware of the risk of venturing out into a dangerous world.

Jesus is told of the slaughter of Galilean worshippers in Jerusalem as he approaches the city with his own Galilean disciples, yet he does not draw back from the journey.

We can push for explanations, looking for villains to blame, perhaps even concluding that others' misfortunes are brought upon themselves.

Such explanations can set "us" comfortably apart from "them".

Jesus will not easily let such matters rest.

We are all sinners whose lives need to be put right with God.

Whatever the rights, wrongs or causes of a catastrophe, alongside our compassion for those who suffer comes a reminder to attend to the state of our own souls.

However long we live, our season will run its course.

Jesus, our gracious gardener, longs to enable us to grow in him and bring forth the fruit we were created to bear.

How do we respond to the opportunity he has won for us?

"Sir, let it alone for one more year."

Luke 13:8a

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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