

Sunday 28th February 2016 - Lent 3
St. Andrew's Totteridge: 8 & 10 a.m.
Luke 13: 1-9, Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Cor. 10:1-13

Come, Buy Milk & Honey Without Price!

Back in 2007, the leading evangelical Bishop of Carlisle, Graham Dow, drew criticism by claiming that the floods his region had experienced were not just a result of a lack of respect for the planet, but also a judgment on society's moral decadence. By way of response another Bishop, the Rt Rev James Jones, the former Bishop of Liverpool, said that "People no longer see natural disasters as an act of God... ..However, we are now reaping what we have sown. If we live in a profligate way then there are going to be consequences." *Daily Telegraph 1st July 2007*

Well, whatever we think about the way God brings about his justice in the world, the regions of Cumbria and the Lake District have taken another meteorological bashing recently and our prayers must continue to be with them, as some residents contend with being flooded out 2-3 times or more over the last few months. But it's interesting to me that, even if people don't believe in acts of God any more, insurance companies still occasionally invoke clauses so-named in their policy exclusions, particularly in the event of natural disasters.

Of course, an alternative response could be to follow in the footsteps of one Betty Penrose of Phoenix, Arizona, who, in 1969, accused God of careless and negligent weather control

after her home was destroyed by a lightning strike and sued the deity for \$89,000 dollars. I believe the idea was to win a default judgment when the defendant failed to appear!

The prophet Isaiah, however, brings a humbling reminder for us all today, for bishops and priests, for preachers, plaintiffs and insurance companies everywhere, 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways... ..my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (vv.8-9).' But first, he brings an invitation to a life of spiritual abundance given freely to all who repent and who forsake evil ways. Conversely, the cost of excess in the material world is high, a profligacy at the expense of body and soul.

The abundance of the Spirit by contrast comes in the form of Paul's fruits of the Spirit (Gal.5.22): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – these cost nothing but honest repentance, earnest endeavour to improve, and the adoption of a degree of self-discipline. These bring free, unparalleled benefits, a veritable harvest of fruits.

So what about that Fig Tree Jesus talks about? What are we to make of this parable? Most larger gardens in the Holy Lands have either a vine or a fig tree, or a group of both. In Jesus' time these were important providers of shade from the heat of the sun as well as being valuable for their delicious fruits. Normally, two years after planting, a fig tree would begin to provide a harvest and gardeners knew that if it hadn't provided by its third year, something was wrong.

But it had to be given a chance – it had to be given that third year, with everything it needed to grow, water, well-fertilized soil, a bit of time and love and attention from the gardener. But after this, if it still failed to provide, it would only be a burden, taking up space and time, draining nutrients, never giving anything back.

Jesus is talking about you and me, about our lives and us. We are meant to be able to give as well as receive, and if we don't give enough then Jesus calls us to repentance. People who just take are not living as God meant them to. We have to be useful, giving people in all the areas of our lives that we can, at home, at school, at work, in church. We have a number of dedicated people here at St. Andrew's who are always prepared to step up and give in one way or another – but not enough. We're no different to any other church in this respect – churches need love and attention too - we need more folk willing to give in whatever ways they can.

We all have something to give to the world around us. If we fail, God doesn't write us off or cut us down – he loves us and gives us another chance. God is always willing to forgive and accept us. But we must not put God's love to the test by making assumptions about how long He will be prepared to wait. The sooner we can start giving the better.

Isaiah 55:1-9 An Invitation to Abundant Life

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! **Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.** ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For **my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.** ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1 Cor 10:1-13 Warnings from Israel's History

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I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Luke 13:1-9

Repent or Perish

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At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you **repent, you will all perish as they did.** ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the **tower of Siloam** fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you **repent, you will all perish just as they did.**'

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

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. ⁷So he said to the gardener, "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?" ⁸He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." '

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