



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 3 2019 11 am

Luke 13.1-9

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus had a somewhat equivocal relationship with Fig Trees: when they suited him, he used them as sermon illustrations and when they did not, he cursed them.

Our gospel today, finds Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and, as he travels, he strews the way with piercing challenges, stark warnings and dire predictions of what is to come.

As would-be disciples are asked if they will be faithful enough to follow him, Jesus reminds them that if they *are* prepared to set their hands to the plough - but keep looking over their shoulders to what has been - they won't be fit for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus sends existing disciples out to spread the good news, but he warns them that he is sending them out 'like lambs among wolves'.

Jesus demands that his followers love God and love their neighbours – and tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to show that by “neighbour” he means “anyone and everyone, anywhere”.

He urges all who have ears to hear what he is saying that they must trust in God for *everything*, even for where their next meal is coming from. Anyone who follows him must be prepared to forgive freely and without limit those who sin against them.

Jesus has come, after all, to do nothing less than set the earth on fire; to set father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.ⁱ

As Jesus journeys towards the ultimate showdown between good and evil, light and darkness, death and life, he gets tough, challenging, ominous - no place here for the “Gentle Jesus meek and mild of the Sunday School Hymnal”! There is urgent work to do - mankind’s destiny is at stake. Jesus is unequivocal, desperate: join me or leave me!

As those who travel with Jesus tell him about yet another Roman massacre – perhaps to spur him into Messianic action – Jesus deflects them and says, Look, forget about the Romans. Have you not been listening to a word I have been saying?

This is not about Romans and Jews, physical territory and taking up yet another inevitably-doomed political cause, this is about you and your relationship with God and God's Kingdom.

Whatever happened to the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, or the eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them, is irrelevant, a sideshow; look to yourselves, repent and believe the Gospel, sort out your lives, your relationships, start living the Kingdom life and do it now!^{lii}

As he travels towards Jerusalem, Jesus is driven by an overpowering sense of urgency. There is not much time left; his message has an almost desperate and frustrated urgency to it.

Unlike those who first heard Jesus' words as they walked and talked with him on the way to Jerusalem, we read the Gospels from the other side of Easter; this side of the cross and the empty tomb.

We know how Jesus' journey to Jerusalem ends; we know and live in the joy and the glory of God's eternal Easter, but today's reading should still bring us up short, challenge us as if we are hearing the words without knowing how things will end.

Are we, am I, a waste of space like the useless fig tree, or does my response to Jesus call result in a rich harvest of fruit – in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

ⁱ Luke 12.53

ⁱⁱ cf 2 Corinthians 6.2