

SECOND CHANCES
3rd Sunday of Lent, March 20, 2022
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When we moved to our acreage there was not one single, solidary tree on the entire three acres... just one very scraggly lilac bush.

Getting some trees planted was a top priority for Diane and me. Into the ground went birch, silver maples, poplars, crabapple, willows and just a few pines. We carved out another section to be a fruit and nut grove. There, we planted pear, plum, cherry, apple, hickory and walnut trees. We watered and fertilized, and we waited season after season until one spring the trees burst into bloom seemly all at once. With a light southerly breeze, the kitchen was a filled with the sweet smell of apple, pear and cherry blossoms. My favorite tree was a golden delicious. With every pass as I mowed in the early fall I would snatch an apple, take a bite and toss the rest to our horses. Oh, these were good apples too... crisp, juicy and sweet. Even our chocolate lab would jump up, grab an apple and run off to the front porch to enjoy her snack.

Then, the derecho hit. Many of our trees were damaged including my

favorite golden delicious tree which was totally uprooted. I honestly felt sad taking the chainsaw to its limbs. After seeing a few shoots pop up from the main trunk, I decided to leave it... I've been watering it and fertilizing it, and now I'm waiting again, waiting to see what happens exactly as the gardener is doing in our Gospel from St. Luke.

Our message today is all about second chances.... repentance and second chances.

We are back on the road to Jerusalem with Jesus and his apostles. Jesus is using what time he has before his passion to teach the disciples and the crowd that travels with the Messiah. A group of people tell Jesus about some Galileans who were murdered by Pontius Pilate then had their blood mixed with the blood of sacrifices offered to pagan gods. Jesus asks the crowd if they think the Galileans were great sinners. Now, it's important to give a historical perspective at this point. In Jesus' time, people were pretty superstitious. If someone got sick, it was because they were a sinner. If a man was blind or woman was barren they may be marked with the sin of a parent. Every malady

or accident seemed to be tied to some level of sin. So, if this awful thing happened to the Galileans they must somehow be deserving due to a great sin. The same as the 18 killed when a tower in Siloam (si-low-um) fell... these must have been terribly bad people. But Jesus says, “By no means!” They were not greater sinners or more guilty than anyone else. But – but – Jesus warns not once but twice with the same words, “If you do not repent, you *will* all perish as they did.”

That brings us to parable about the fig tree. The owner planted the tree three years ago and he has been patiently waiting each season for it to bear fruit. None is given. So, the owner tells the gardener to chop it down... it’s a waste bearing no fruit and exhausting the soil. Surely, we can plant something more worthwhile that will provide some sort of produce? The gardener pleads with the owner... let’s give it another year... I will tend it closely, fertilize it and cultivate the soil. The owner agrees to give it a second chance.

Now, Jesus’ parables can often be looked at from many angles. In the owner, I see Jesus. I see myself as the tree. I see the gardener as

the Church. The Church intervenes on my behalf... asking Jesus for a second chance. The Church offers care, guidance, the Mass and the sacraments... the fertilizer and cultivations. It is up to me, the tree, to respond to this care... to repent and bear fruit, or ignore the care and be chopped into firewood. In your mind's eye, who's who in your parable? Are you the owner and Christ the gardener? Perhaps you are the tree trying to figure out how best to bear fruit? Maybe you read it an entirely different way.

One thing is for sure, God takes delight in the opportunity to offer us second chances, continual second chances. The Old and New Testaments bear witness to a forgiving God. Think of Moses, who murdered a man (*Exodus 2:11-15*); Jonah, who fled from God's command (*Jonah 1*); David, who committed adultery and had a man murdered (*2 Samuel 11:14-17*); Rahab, who was a prostitute in Jericho (*Joshua 2*); and Peter, who denied even knowing Jesus after spending three years with Him (*Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:55-62, John 18:15-17 and 25-27*). Each of these—and dozens of other men

and women like them in scripture—stand as monuments of God's grace (*Hebrews 11*). Each of these people repented, sought a second chance and we would do well to follow in their footsteps. Are our sins or embarrassment of such, so great we don't -- feel we can't -- seek a second chance? But we can! And – we should!

We are halfway through our Lenten journey. Jesus is almost to Jerusalem. He implores us to repent, and be ready for the Kingdom of God... but what does that mean? It's simple... to express sincere regret for wrong doings and commit to change for the better... we do this through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.. in this sacrament we find what could be called the “sacrament of second chances.”

Then, on Easter morning, we can stand before Jesus found in the Eucharist strong, deeply rooted, fragrant in bloom, beautiful to the eye, ready to bear abundant fruit for the Glory of God!