

## **Sermon for March 7, 2010 Lent 3C – St. Francis**

We were reminded again these last two weeks with the devastating earthquake in Chile and the random shooting of junior high school students leaving class in Colorado horrible things can happen unexpectedly and without warning to people who are just like us. We are still reeling from the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti as the recovery efforts continue. The rainy season in that island nation has caused more buildings to collapse. At least this time I did not hear misguided religious leaders trying to lay the blame of these events on the moral state of the victims. The theological and public outcry against such an absurd conclusion by a well-known religious leader after the January 12 Haitian earthquake made clear that this type of reckless theology did not meet with what we have come to understand about God and God's ways. We need only to look at today's passage from Luke to hear Jesus talking to us about this: And Jesus "asked them: Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No I tell you."

Such sudden and horrific deaths are not a result of the victims' actions in life. While I believe that we as a nation understand that more acutely in this post 9/11 era, it can still be a temptation to wonder, "Why these people?" Despite these words from Jesus and many other teachings and passages to the contrary in moments of shock and grief there is a tendency to revert to childhood associations that if we are good then really good things will happen to us and if we are bad really bad things will happen to us. The reality is that while there can be obvious consequences to our actions, day to day life shows that bad things can happen to both good and bad people.

If we are honest we will agree with the Rev. Barbara Crafton, an Episcopal priest and author of several devotional books as well as on-line meditations, when she maintains that each of us is "an uncomfortable hybrid of virtue and fault". That is the fact that Jesus is pointing to when he admonishes his listeners "to repent." Not one of us by our own actions and virtues are able to earn God's acceptance. God loves us despite ourselves. Jesus knew that he would die a brutal and unjust death. Jesus the only one without sin knew he would die as a result of our sins. But he did not blame us, he did not even blame the crowd as they watched him die. He did call us back. He did remind us of our need for God. He did call us to repent. For we must actively and continually acknowledge our need of God if we are to fully allow God's gifts to work through us in this lifetime. That is why we vow to

“persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin to repent and return to the Lord” at our Baptism.

Every one of us is guilty of sin. We acknowledge our sins both personal and corporate every time we gather for Holy Eucharist. And we are guilty of sins of omission those things we have not done just as we are guilty of sins of commission those things we have done that we should not have done. We sin against God and we sin against our neighbor. But a lot of times we'd rather focus on what our neighbor has done to us. Even worse when something goes wrong in our life we are tempted to think, “Why me God?” “What did I ever do to deserve this?” The answer may seem like deafening silence. We know and we don't know. Just as we know and don't know why the Hebrews were held as slaves in Egypt. In the beginning of the Book of Exodus we read: “There arose in Egypt a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph,” certainly poignant words. So we understand but we don't understand why they became slaves. We do know those men, women, and children were led to freedom from bondage in Egypt by Moses. Moses was a murderer. Moses though raised in the Egyptian court had fled to live as a shepherd after killing an Egyptian for beating another Hebrew. But even this sin did not disqualify Moses from being an instrument for God in this world. Though initially reluctant, Moses did learn to follow God and to deeply depend on God.

Through Moses God demonstrated that the Divine is active and present at work in this world and that God can use us as messengers, workers, and leaders in such Divine activity. An amazing thing happened as relief workers arrived in the days after the January 12 earthquake in Haiti. People who had so little food would share what little they had with those who came to help. Katie Myers, the Episcopal Relief & Development first responder shared stories in a conference call of arriving in town after town only to be met by villagers who had set tables of seasoned rice behind the rubble of broken buildings. Tables set to thank her for coming to be with them. The response of our church, of our nation, and of people around the world to help the people of Haiti and to help the people of Chile demonstrates that we can and we will stand together to help our neighbors.

Moses knew that fire destroys, we know that fire destroys, but fire did not kill that bush that Moses saw. Instead of death, God spoke from that burning bush and assured Moses then and us now that while destructive forces are real and are at work in this world, God's grace is also at work. In

Jesus' parable, a gardener still cared for and tended that fig tree which did not produce figs. At times in life we may serve as that gardener tending and caring for others who need help to be who they were created to be. At other times we may feel like that fig tree needing such care to become the person we were created to be. God gives us others, God gives us the good gifts in life one of the greatest of which is our life on this earth. God tends our roots, nourishes us, and sustains us even when we fail to live as the person God created us to be. Jesus' question to us is: What will you do with the gift of God's grace?

