

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Third Sunday in Lent

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Like a tent in the wilderness, God's table stands ready;

A place of sanctuary and safety, of hospitality and healing.

Come, all you who are tired and travel-stained, footsore and famished;

Come with your fellow travelers to find companionship and comfort.

Jesus waits to meet us here and welcome us in,

Offering rest and renewal, solace and strength, for the journey still to come.

Opening Prayer

Lord, help us to see: to see what is eternally good and true, and having seen, to go on searching until we come to the joys of heaven. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Gospel

Luke 13: 1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He 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; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." 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. So 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?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Poem: "The Fig Tree"

By Juana de Ibarbourou

Because is it harsh and ugly,
because all of its branches are grey,
I feel sorry for the fig tree.
On my farm there are hundred of beautiful trees:
round plum trees,
straight lemon trees,
orange trees with shiny blossoms.
In spring time
they all get covered with flowers
around the fig tree.
And the poor thing seems very sad
with its twisted branches that are never
dressed in buds.
Therefore
every time I pass it
I say, trying
to give a sweet and happy tone to my voice:
"The fig tree is the most beautiful
among all the trees in the garden".
If it listens,
If it understands the language that I am speaking,
what a sweet grace will nestle
in its sensitive soul!
And, maybe at night,
when the wind is fanning its crown,
drunk with joy it may tell:

Today I was told I am beautiful!

Meditation

Jesus, on his final journey to Jerusalem, speaks to his disciples in parables and urges on them the need for repentance. Here, he invites them to consider repentance through three vignettes. The first two are contemporary incidents: Pilates' murder of worshippers in the temple at Jerusalem, and the death of those killed by a falling tower. One of these is deliberate, and the other accidental, but the point is the same: these people were no more sinful than anyone else; they are not being punished for particular sinfulness. But the omnipresence of death is an invitation to everyone to repentance -- the turning around, or change of mind, that God is always offering. The parable of the fig tree is the clearest example of the ever-present chance of repentance: the gardener pleads with the landowner to let him try again to invite the fig tree to be change its ways and be fruitful.

The poem, by the Uruguayan poet Juana de Ibarbourou, looks at the unfruitful fig tree with eyes of love, inviting it to flower internally by telling it how beautiful it is. Turning back from the poem to the gospel, we can perhaps see the gracious invitation from the gardener as well. The gardener might be saying, "I know you can do it. I will give you everything you need, and then you will be able to become what you were born to be." There is no threat here, only an invitation and a welcome.

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever made a dramatic change in your life that led to greater freedom, or connection, or inner peace, or renewed energy? What made that possible? Would you consider using the word repentance to describe that process?

What do you need in order to flourish? The gardener digs around the fig tree and gives it manure; the poet tells the fig tree it is beautiful. What do you need?

Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

Poem this week offered by: Matt Bentley
Reflections this month offered by: Rev'd Elizabeth Randall