

**SERMON: "WHERE ARE YOU GOING FOR LENT? A WAITING ROOM"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 63:1-8  
NEW TESTAMENT LUKE 13:1-9**

**March 23, 2025  
Third Sunday in Lent**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Been lots in the news lately about people's jobs being cut, big abrupt cuts  
Conversations about the value of a person's work. That, combined with  
my experience with doctors and medicines aplenty, got me thinking ...  
Is there a department at the major pharmaceutical companies  
that all they do is come up with the names of drugs?

And do these good people play scabble at work ... why all the drug names  
with an x or a z? I cannot pronounce or spell most of these medical terms.  
One bit of medical verbiage, however, makes perfect sense  
It is the word used to identify the person receiving that medical care  
We are aptly called 'patients.'

If I've visited with you or yours in the hospital or afterwards, you've probably heard me  
bring this up. The word makes sense - you have to be patient when you are a patient  
Recovery, health (in whatever form it takes, whatever route it takes)  
is going to take plenty of patience

The lectionary passages for today point us into a consideration of patience,  
specifically God's patience with us as made evident in the parable of the fig tree  
and how it is paired with the story that proceeds it – a story with some urgency

Talking to his disciples and to the crowds, Jesus uses current events  
to deal with a question that's been around forever ... the question  
that inevitably tries to link human behavior and divine judgment,

Jesus raises the question himself referring to the news of Galileans  
who had been slaughtered by Pilate when they had come to Jerusalem  
to worship in the Temple, a violent act of oppression against his own people  
**"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way  
they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"**

Jesus goes on to ask a related question, this time about eighteen people who died  
in a tragic accident when a tower collapsed on top of them ... **"Do you think  
that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?"**  
Did these innocent victims, folks who died only because they were in  
the wrong place at the wrong time, get what they deserved?

## **BOTH / AND**

To both questions, Jesus offers the same answer ... He doesn't!

He doesn't answer with a simple cause and effect argument

Instead he turns the question back at us, makes it personal and urgent.

**“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will perish just as they did.”**

The story doesn't provide us with an easy kind of either / or answer to our questions

What the story does do is tell us what to do. Repent, change our ways.

It does so with a sense of urgency, no time like the present

Jesus says the same thing twice to get the point across ...

**“No, I tell you; unless you repent, you will perish just as they did.”**

His teaching here could end like that, challenging us to change our ways right away

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He keeps talking. He tells another story.

**Then Jesus 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. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”**

Like the fig tree, we are given another chance so that we might bear good fruit.

Like the gardener in the parable, God is patient with us giving us time to blossom

Giving us more than time really since it is the gardener who plants the seed, who waters the plant, who fertilizes the soil, who pulls the weeds.

Give the fig tree another year. Care for it, nurture it. Give it time!

That is what God does with us. You see how God's mercy and God's patience make repentance possible, how repentance leads to growth, to bearing fruit?

The turnaround that is repentance begins with urgency then continues with patient perseverance.

I've learned to talk about patience and perseverance as a set – doubles tennis

They go together, work together – intertwined and interdependent.

Patience isn't just sitting and waiting (probably should lose the waiting room title)

Perseverance isn't just plowing ahead. “Stand back. I got this!”

Together they are recovery, growth ... gardening

Think about it. If all we had was the first story about the urgency to turn things round

Or if all we had was a fig tree that produced no fruit, where would we be?

Well, we wouldn't have any Fig Newtons, would we?

## **SIXTY YEARS**

Patience and perseverance from God the gardener make growth happen  
God provides both. We need both. Think about what that looks like  
in your own journey – the times patience needed to hang back and volley  
from the baseline, the times perseverance pounced on shots at the net

And thinking plural, doubles tennis, notice how these stories are not about  
an individual. Jesus uses stories from their news headlines about  
groups of people. So, I ask you to think a bit about how God's patience  
and perseverance have been evident in our shared history

Change, the change God desires, doesn't happen over night  
Not even today with a news cycle that we've seen move to a 24 hour cycle  
to what seems like a 24 minute or 24 characters news cycle  
We learn our history thinking about events, about dates  
But change. Esp. change for the better, takes time and ongoing effort

Given that this weekend marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March,  
I'd like us to take some time to consider that movement when we think about  
God's patience and perseverance with us ... and the patience and perseverance  
it requires of us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God

It was 60 years ago yesterday the marchers made it to the Alabama state capital,  
completing their march. I've been there. There is no sign, no marker to remember  
the historic march. I looked for one. I asked around. There's the large statue  
of Jefferson Davis, president of the confederacy. There's a star marking where  
he was inaugurated before the Confederate capital was moved to Richmond.

That's Montgomery. I've also been the Selma, walked across the bridge.  
I made a video as I did. I share it with you apologizing in advance for my  
rather limited technical skills. You can tell I am not active on social media.

I share my reflections with you to raise a question about patience and perseverance –  
how much have things changed since then?

### ***Share video – number 1***

As a citizen of the Kingdom of God and a citizen of this great nation, I needed time  
on that bridge to reflect on what I have done and am doing with my time  
Have I been aware of God's patience and perseverance with me, with us?  
Have I practiced patience? Have I let perseverance push me forward?

### ***Share video – number 2***

## SUMMARY

We'd like to think that our history, our own individual stories and our story as a people, is one of steady progress. My time in Selma and frankly my time in Iowa with one effort after another to frame diversity as a problem to be solved has taught me that myth of progress is, at best, a half truth and, in far too many cases, a convenient lie we tell ourselves

### ***Share video – number 3***

I admit there are times the sadness and the anger overwhelm me  
They leave me exhausted and frustrated. Then I remember how those who went before us did the work, how they persevered. And they did so knowing they probably would not see justice roll down like waters ... at least not at full strength and spray. But they carried on. So too will I.

I will carry on inspired by their example, by their sacrifice  
And I will do so with the firm conviction that what makes this nation great is not our history ... it is our ability to learn from our history  
our willingness to learn from our history

Thinking back over how much has (and has not) changed over the last 60 years,  
I am struck by a simple truth made evident in the parable of the fig tree  
God's patience and perseverance with us will bear fruit  
and the harvest will be all the better the more patient and perseverant we are

Trusting in God's patience and perseverance, let me then ask the ushers  
to come forward with the first of our two offerings this morning  
With this offering, we ask that you take something out of the plate  
A reminder of God's patience and perseverance  
May the fruit of the tree sustain for the journey ahead