

FERTILIZE IT

We continue today with our preparation for Easter.

As I have said before, these 40 days before Easter are called Lent. During this Lenten season, we are focusing on growing our faith.

Two weeks ago, on the First Sunday of Lent, we talked about bringing ourselves a little closer to God by focusing on Him more. We talked about giving something up for Lent that means something to us, and when we think about whatever it was that we gave up, we should reflect on what God gave up for us through Jesus.

Now some of you gave up stuff and others of you added things to your lives like doing extra studying or devotions.

I would really enjoy hearing about some of the things you might have given up or added to your lives these past couple of weeks and how it has been a struggle or a joy.

For those of you who were here 2 Sundays ago, you will remember that I decided to give up some of my free time for Lent. See, Thursday nights have been one of the few nights during the week that I was able to do nothing.

I might have spent them watching TV, or reading a book or doing nothing in particular. But see, my wife has been going square dancing on Thursday nights and hasn't pressured me to go with her for over a year now.

So I decided that during Lent, I would give up my free night and go square dancing with her.

So I have been there twice now since Lent has started. Sure, I really missed my free time, but my sacrifice means so much to my wife. She was smiling from ear to ear while she was dancing with me.

Last Thursday when I saw how that little sacrifice meant so much to her, it just reminded me of the large sacrifice Jesus made for you and me, – how much that really should mean to us.

Then last week, on the Second Sunday of Lent, we talked about making decisions in our lives – some of them hard – and deciding to put our faith into God and trusting God.

We talked about how that can confuse us – or scare us. We talked about how people are dying in this world today because they choose to be a Christian. And how would we answer if asked if we were a Christian when a gun was pointed at our heads?

Some of us know what we would say. Others of us... Well, let's just say for those who aren't quite there yet in their faith journey, take this Lenten Season to try to work through your doubts. Talk to your friends, your spouse, or myself to help you understand your faith a little more.

Come to church every Sunday during this season and try to focus more and more on God and ask him to help you grow in your faith.

Now our scripture for today speaks to a couple of areas I think we should focus on as well during this Lenten Season.

The first part of it talks about some people being killed by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate and then it speaks about 18 people being killed when a tower fell on top of them.

Now the group that was killed by Pontius Pilate probably committed some crime, but what about those 18 that the tower fell on?

What was their crime? Did they do something wrong?

What we get out of these verses and the preceding chapter is insight that God wasn't the reason these people died. God wasn't punishing them.

The Roman Empire was punishing the Galileans. But who was being punished with those 18 that died when the tower fell?

This paragraph hits us at a pretty vulnerable place. It makes us realize that none of us can protect ourselves, or those we love for that matter, from every danger, disease, traffic accident, crime, or random violence.

While that sounds like a sad message, it is to remind us that life is fragile. That we need to take the time to love each other every day before something happens – and when something does happen and we did take the time to love them, then we can rejoice that we had the time we did.

But Jesus also tells us that we never know about our own lives. How much longer any of us have.

So he tells us to repent. And that can be a scary word. Most of us have heard about the guy standing on a street corner, wearing a sandwich board, screaming, “Repent, for the time of the Lord is near.”

Well, today, we just point at him, laugh, or pretend that we don’t see him.

But he is just giving the same message Jesus gave us.

Repent – tell God we are sorry for not trusting him, for not loving him, for not living the way we should.

Jesus was telling us to get our lives right with God.

Then he goes into some story about a fig tree.

Interesting little story. This man had a fig tree planted in a vineyard for 3 years – and it didn’t produce any fruit.

Okay, now let’s picture this in our minds. Here you are in Israel – not the best climate in the world. We have only a small amount of land that is good for growing certain types of vegetation.

In your vineyard, which you rely on for income, you have this big tree, taking up your water, and plenty of space.

Now what is unique about fig trees, they are super easy to manage. Supposedly they are so easy to grow, that even I could have one!

So here is your beautiful vineyard, and your big fig tree, that hasn't produced a single fig in 3 years.

So what do you do?

The man who owned the property wanted to do what most of us would want to do. He wanted to chop it down. Use that land for growing something worthwhile.

Besides some shade, what was the purpose of that tree? He didn't get any figs from it. What a waste. The tree didn't do what it was supposed to do.

But in the story, Jesus gives us a little glimpse of the nature of God. A God of second chances.

As read for us that the gardener said, no, let's not chop it down, let's dig a trench, fill it with fertilizer, nurture it a little and see what happens.

Where most of us would give up on something, God doesn't. Even if we turn our back on him, he is still there waiting for us to come back – he wants to give us that second chance – or third chance – or fourth chance.

Jesus tells us, repent, turn back towards God.

I was going to call this sermon “Spreading the Manure” – but I thought it would give the wrong idea.

So if we are the tree, how can we add some fertilizer to our lives? Something to help us grow and produce something more than shade – something more like producing good fruit?

I don’t think there is any one thing in particular. I believe it is a combination of three different things.

The first one is attempting to continually look towards God. God is reaching out to us right now – we have to reach back to him. By making a commitment to him, and earnestly trying to have a relationship with him. By praying to him – even if you don’t know how to pray, just try – you can’t get it wrong.

The second way to help us grow is by studying. Reading the Bible, or doing daily devotions, getting in a Bible study, reading a commentary about Jesus – or whatever it is. As I say quite often, don’t take my word for it. We all have the same textbook – read it for yourself.

The third way to help us grow is by action. Once we commit to following God – we need to show we are Christians.

By the way we live our lives – by not flipping that guy off that cut in front of us in traffic – by not yelling at the waitress that dropped hot coffee in our laps. But by our love. Helping the church when we adopt a local school and help with school supplies, or volunteering for something with the less fortunate – or whatever it is.

Living our life as a Christian is showing action the way God wants us to. And as we grow in our faith, our action should grow and change as well.

So let's look again at those three parts – Devotion towards God – sometimes called Piety, Study, Action – They are the three main ways for us to grow in our faith.

And if you take any of them away – and it makes it a lot harder to grow.

So let's continue to work towards growing in our faith this Lenten Season – Keep our focus on God – and open our hearts and allow him into our lives.

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