

“The God of Many Chances”

Judy Nielsen, Presiding over worship
Sunday, March 24, 2019

Luke 13:1-9

Let us pray: Loving God, God of many chances, open our eyes, our ears, and our minds to what you want to teach us today. Amen.

I am pretty sure that all of us have at some time in our lives experienced second chances....either on the giving or receiving end.

Just last week I heard that the Lansing Mayor hosted a breakfast for area employers to ask them to extend job opportunities to past, rehabilitated offenders who have served their time in prison and need a second chance.

When we think of chances, we probably can think of people, family members, neighbors, co-workers, or friends who have given us second chances, or whom we have extended multiple chances to.

The Bible is full of examples of people God has given many chances to....foremost was David who committed almost every offense there is....and as we heard in Isaiah today God “made him a witness to the people and a leader of commander”. Then we remember the thief on the cross, the woman at the well, Adam, Moses, Peter, Thomas, and on and on. We could add ourselves to the list also.

Today in the Gospel from Luke, we hear about the fig tree that Jesus gave a second chance to. What?? EVEN A TREE???

Jesus teaches the truth that the fruitless trees must be given chance after chance to produce. (Do you think this story has anything to do with us?) Even though the land in ancient Israel was very expensive and hard to till, the slave was told to continue to fertilize the tree until fruit appeared.....UNTIL FRUIT APEARED!!!!

A tree that does not produce fruit is worthless wherever it is planted. Maybe to people, but not to God. He can see the worth in every person, just as He sees the worth in the fig tree.

Christ looks through the person and sees the potential. Like a great sculptor who views a piece of granite and sees the marvelous statue inside that will be brought forth, so God looks at us.

In our society today, one does not always get a second chance, but people who are dismissed by others merit worth in the eyes of Christ.

In Christ, the second chance door stands always open. If you failed at something the door is not slammed in your face.

We can be happy that the Kingdom of God is not composed of chopped down forests, but of forests that have been revitalized.

Trees that spring back from catastrophes or tornados or other violent storms, often are damaged and may even have a crooked stem, but they are still alive. As the tree, the Lord accepts us with our imperfections and damages, but loves us anyway.

What Luke was trying to show us, was that the important thing is that we take root in Christ. Sometimes waiting for a tree, or a person, to bear spiritual fruit, takes people who are willing to be Spiritual gardeners.

Sometimes it is hard not to give up on people when they make the same mistakes over and over again. I am thankful that God never gives up on us.

In the whole story of the ministry of Jesus, is there anything more extra ordinary in the way He went to the most unlikely looking people, people who had made a mess of, or had done nothing with their lives. He spoke to them with a kind of supernatural hopefulness about what they could do or yet become.

He didn't dwell on their bad choices, or their mistakes, or what "might" have been. He looked at people with the faith of "what yet might be" and the truth that they still could become sons and daughters of God.

Jesus knew His Father was the God of second chances, and third, and on and on.

Our opening hymn today..."Just As I Am"...emphasizes how God calls us to come to Him. We don't have to "Clean up our lives" first....as someone once told me as the reason he didn't attend church. God wants us "just as we are". If He wants us to change, He will work in us, usually so very gently we don't even realize it.

Our human minds find it difficult to comprehend the God who knows all about us and loves us anyway.

The reading from Isaiah today ends with "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways". How true; we will never understand God, but He fully knows and understands us.

And as John Newton writes in the hymn we will end with "....." Amazing Grace....that saved a wretch like me", our God truly is the God of Many Chances. This give me hope and I trust it gives you the same; that no matter what happens to me, or around me, my God, the God of many chances will never change. He will always love me, always forgive me and always welcome me with open arms. Amen.