

## **One More Chance**

Isaiah 55:1-9

Luke 13: 6-9

March 8, 2010

United Memorial - Lent 3

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

God of never ending growth and second chances, here we are again... may the words of my mouth and the mediations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

Have you ever taken a drive through your neighbourhood or someone else's neighbourhood on garbage night?

Are you amazed at the things that people throw away?

Are you amazed how people will stop and pick stuff up?

When I moved from one building to another last year, there was a lovely little computer desk out by the garbage bin that sits between the two buildings.

I checked it out, it was in good condition, just covered in a lot of dust.

In fact, I think it came from the apartment I was moving into and it fits perfectly in one corner of the spare bedroom.

I admit, I felt a bit odd taking it, but I did, and I have used it ever since.

While I was visiting my sister in Germany, I found out that the town of Heidelberg had what was called: Big Garbage Day.

This was a time when you could put anything out by the curb that you no longer wanted, but it might be useful to someone else and they could just pick it up without and take it.

I thought this was a great idea!

Better than wind up in the landfill.

The small community I lived in in Ontario did this annually... and I understand that HRM is going to do that twice a year.

Someone's garbage is going to get a second chance.

What, you might ask does this have to do with this week's readings?

Well, the gospel reading about the barren fig tree spoke to me loudly.

The landowner wants to cut it down, because it hadn't borne any fruit.

The gardener pleads for a time extension... give me another year, he says... I will nurture it... fertilize it and tend it carefully, then make a decision at the end of that time...

Are we like that fig tree?

Not bearing any fruit?

Is the fig tree to blame?

Are we to blame?

Perhaps the circumstances we have wound up in have not been nourishing to us...

Perhaps we need to change what we are feeding ourselves.

And perhaps, we could take a second look at our circumstances and realize that we have what we need, and we could change how we think about it.

And not give in to hopelessness and its seductive power.

I shared the following with you last year and as we head into our Annual Meeting, I think it bears repeating:

They were said by David Stevens, Leader of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, made at the Service of Dedication a couple of years ago. Here is part of what he said:

"There is a temptation or a tendency to look with morbid fascination of what has gone wrong, or what is going wrong. It's part of human life. And we in Corrymeela, which is a group committed to reconciliation and peace, are no exception in this.

There is the pleasant schadenfreude, which is a wonderful German word which means enjoyment obtained from the troubles of others.

There is a certain shadenfreude in watching things go wrong and there is the destructive tendency to encourage them to go wrong.

Our personal negativity has a wish for general negativity."

And Thom Shuman writes this: *In other words, if I am pessimistic (and part of a group), rather than letting the group lift my spirits or help change my attitude, I want the rest of the group to be pessimistic.*

*In churches, most people leave, most conflict results, most ministers are "removed" not because of any one incident/sermon/decision, but because of an undercurrent of negativity.*

*It's all too true - group dynamics are often affected more by the negativity of a small percentage of people than all the positive outlooks of the majority.*

*So, what can a person, a group, a church do?*

*Not surprisingly, David Stevens turns to Scripture.*

*He goes on to say, "When Peter tries to counteract human weakness with words of hope, he did not encourage people to say what was wrong with the world, the church, or society.*

*He did not ask people to draw up a list of problems or negatives.*

*Instead he asks them simply to give an account of the hope that is in them: ". . . explain the hope you have in you." (1 Peter 3:15)*

*And don't just explain - live out that hope you have in you.*

*Take that hope you have in you – even if it is buried so deep inside of you that you are not aware of it - and offer it as a fragrant offering to everyone around you.*

*Because if you do, then slowly, tentatively, gently, joyfully, they will begin to share that hope they have deep within themselves.*

*And no one will be the same any more. (© 2006 Thom M. Shuman)*

We are called to name that hope...

One of the responses I got to my Weekly Reflections was this:

*We can be manure in barren spots by holding on, with God's support, to a vision.*

*This church did not get in debt overnight and it won't get out of debt overnight.*

*While we have to live in reality there is too much emphasis being put on the money situation which brings on despair.*

*I believe God want this church to continue and to minister to each other and to gather for worship.*

*So let's envision his power like Joshua did.*

*Perhaps it might help our church to select parts of the Bible to read at home as a church. (Pat Wrin)*

Wise, thoughtful, challenging and hope-filled words.

Over and over again our scripture tells us that God is with us in good times and in bad.

God holds out the promise that there is new life waiting for us...

As our creed says, "In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us, we are not alone."

We are not alone...

Have you ever noticed that 'we' part of that statement?

We do not stand and say our Creed as individuals, but as a community.

We are not alone.

We are connected to one another, and to God and Jesus.

And like a gardener who wants another chance for a tree, we always get a second chance... and a third chance and a fourth chance....

We may need to change what is around us, we may need to change what we are using for fertilizer, but we are always given the opportunity to bear fruit.

Thanks be to God who nurtures us, encourages us and sometimes compels us into new life...  
amen.