

Sermon: March 20, 2022

Rethink That!

Luke 13:1-9

A mass shooting occurred at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, on November 5, 2017. The gunman killed 26 people. They were murdered in worship. Christian.

At the Tree of Life Synagogue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania there was a mass shooting on October 27, 2018, while Shabbat morning services were being held. Eleven people were killed. They were murdered in worship. Jewish.

At Al Noor mosque and the Linwood mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand there were two consecutive white supremacist terrorist attacks during Friday prayers on 15 March 2019. 49 people were killed. They were murdered in worship. Muslim.

And here is our gospel reading: Some Galileans, around 26 A.D., were murdered while making an offering in the temple. The news records that Pilate ordered the murders.

Someone rushed up to Jesus, "Jesus, did you hear?" Pastors get that a lot! "Preacher, did you hear what old Joe did last night?" "Preacher did you hear that Bill got drunk at the honky tonk and got into a fight and the sheriff has him in jail?" "Preacher did you hear? Do you know what they are saying about you?"

"Rabbi did you hear about the Galileans murdered by Pilate while offering sacrifice in the Temple?" We often miss the point.

Right here in between the people rushing to report bad news to Jesus and Jesus responding, there's this huge disconnect. No one asked the names of those killed. No one goes to check on the families – wives and children. Nobody offers to bring a casserole and a cake and some drinks. When people get killed in the streets of our cities, people line up to take sides – most often racial sides.

Blame is the game we play. We like to blame. Price of gas? Blame the government. Feelings hurt? Blame the church. See how we are? Instead of a focus on solutions, we take sides. We have arguments. We ignore the dead. I confess that I'm unnerved by the Americans who keep insisting that we don't have to care for the Ukrainians because they are so far away, and they are not one of us. Do you know how many Christians there are in Ukraine? I don't have to choose between Ukraine and the USA. As a Christian, I am committed to the well being of all human beings. The God I serve sent Jonah to Nineveh; sent Paul to Asia Minor. The God I love is a universal God that has made of one flesh all peoples. The God I love said, "Go make disciples of

all nations." Do you think Ukrainians are of less value than Americans? You need to think again? Did you know that the Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists have 2800 churches, 3 seminaries, 2 universities, and 15 Bible colleges?

Of all things, Jesus says, "Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." Our lives are fragile and precarious even when aided by technology. We are not in control. Scientists have an endangered species list: sea turtles, bluefin tunas, and the fin whale are a few of the species in danger of extinction. Well, humanity can be added to the endangered species list because a power-hungry dictator has nuclear weapons and has threatened to use them. Putin – "this small, short, little grim man who shells hospitals" and buildings with the word children scrawled in Russian doesn't deter him either. Like it or not, liberals and conservatives are all in the same predicament of precarity.

Luke attaches a story. A fig tree has been unproductive for three years. "Cut it down! Throw it away!" In our country, as likely as not, someone is always wanting to get rid of somebody or somebodies.

But the gardener says, "Let's give the tree one more year." What a piece of good news.

Jesus decides to give us another year. Jesus, believing in us, as he surely does, refuses to give up on us.

Repenting turns out to be the good news. It is a rethinking of everything. Every worship we attend is an opportunity to rethink, to participate with "openness to repentance."

How long has it been since you changed your mind about anything? Have you noticed how often people are challenged to change their minds in the Bible? Do you realize that the books of the New Testament were minority reports designed to call on the majority to change their minds? In the Bible, some religious folks got the idea that God didn't care for Gentiles and foreigners. Jonah's story shouts, "Rethink that!" Other religious folks thought that all of creation was for their self-gratification, for taking what they wanted and the devil-take-the-hind-most. Job's story about creation cries out from the ground, "Rethink that!" Some Americans have the notion they are God's new chosen people, well, the Jews, God's chosen people, say "Rethink that!" Some American have the idea that they should be free to do as they please about everything no matter who gets hurt. Rethink that!

The church that received the epistle of Hebrews was having attendance problems. The pastor said, "Rethink that! Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting

to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." I once asked a church member who had not been to church in 25 years, "Do you ever think of coming back?" She said "No" and that ended that conversation. I asked another church person, "Have you ever considered the possibility that you might be wrong?" She said, "Preacher, do you know the last time a squirrel missed its jump? I can tell you in one word, 'Never.' So, no I never think that I'm wrong. Would you like a cup of coffee?" I seem to have a gift for ending conversations.

I fear we have all become William Jennings Bryan caricatures. In the Scopes Monkey Trial, Bryan said, "I do not think about things I don't think about." Darrow retorted: "Do you think about things you do think about?" I have little confidence that people are doing much thinking about God and the purposes of God. In the novel *Raney*, a frustrated Raney tells her husband, "Who don't think? Everybody thinks." Maybe, but sometimes thinking is a mere matter of opinion not rooted in facts. I'm not sure people are actively thinking about God, about God's purposes in life. Process theologians say that the more often we say yes to the purpose of God, the more likely we are to keep saying yes. The opposite is also true. The more often you say no to the purpose of God, the more difficult it will be to ever say yes. If you have a practice of ignoring God, of dissing God, of not thinking about God, of saying no to God, you are more likely to maintain that same habit. You will have a difficult time thinking differently. This is think is more of the problem than anything else. It's not that people are atheists, they are simply apathetic. They are not consciously thinking about God. Theology means to think about God and talk about God. When thinking and talking about God leaves your conversations, you are moving away from God. I have doubts that people are panting to follow the instructions of Paul, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

God has given us all the time we need to rethink everything, subvert the paradigms, and change what needs changing, especially our minds. Now, let us reconsider, rethink, re-examine, review, re-evaluate, reassess, reappraise, what we believe, how we act, how we treat others. Thank God, the gardener has given us another year. We still have time. Rethink everything!

