

There are just moments we never get used to. We know death comes to all, but how do we deal with horrific deaths like murder or cancer in a child? Why are famine and disease more prevalent in impoverished countries? Is that divine punishment? On the other hand, why do some who are obviously evil or blatantly selfish deserve being rich, powerful, or famous?

Why does it often seem those who should be rewarded by God are punished, and those who should be punished by God are rewarded? We assume fairness should be guaranteed and question God when it isn't. How much of our current political debates are geared toward such thoughts? Whatever anyone wants should be a right, and whenever anyone feels that they have been treated unfairly, someone else should be punished.

Jesus commented on his own current events, asking if those killed by Pilate or lives lost in a building accident were more guilty than those who weren't affected? Jesus' answer was "NO! It is a broken world." That has been biblical message from the beginning. Adam and Eve broke trust. Cain murdered his brother. Babel was an attempt to use man's wisdom to "play God." Sin is the result of sin. It isn't a punishment but a symptom of a world which has abandoned God for the idolatry of "self." Genesis is not about God creating the potential for sin but explaining that humans think they are smarter than God, or don't need God, and such brokenness is rampant.

All live with this guilt. All suffer this brokenness. All die because life isn't heaven on earth. And in this imperfect world, sometimes evil people get away with murder and sometimes good people face undeserved pain. Paul's summary is: "All sin and fall short of God's glory." Without God's intervention it would be worse – not just now but forever!

Jesus used the parable of fig tree to help his audience understand the answer. When a fig tree does what we expect, there is no questioning of God's goodness. But when the harvest isn't what we expect, we want to blame and act. And so, "cut it down!" The punch line of Jesus' parable ending introduces a new twist as Jesus asks, "why not give it another chance?" Rather than allowing us to control the question, he offers grace. *"Why not give it, or her, or him another year? Why not work on this a little longer? Why not encourage growth rather than obsess over brokenness?"*

Maybe we need worry less about our concept of fairness and more about what it means to be a disciple. That has always been God's approach. Cain was protected. The ark saved a creation drowning in sin. A great fish turned Jonah's escape into discipleship. After adultery and murder, David was given another chance. Story after story, God is consistent.

Do you see how we misuse scripture texts such as what Paul has shared, or use our logic to try to understand what can't be understood? Most celebrate St. Patrick's Day as an excuse to drink. What a wasted opportunity to grow! Patrick was captured, tortured, and carried away as a slave. In prison, he came to know Jesus. He escaped and returned home with no guarantee he wouldn't be recaptured. But he was convinced he must take the opportunity to share Christ in his homeland that had not yet come to faith. His faith became a light in the darkness and brought a nation to faith. That fig tree used its second chance to God's glory!

The image of a worthless fig tree nursed back to life by outside help (a gardener who will dig and fertilize) is quite a sight. It calls to mind Jesus' journey heaven to embrace us as a helpless infant or surrendering divinity to rub shoulders with lepers and outcasts. And how about being planted in the dirt of a tomb! This is the definition of grace and shows God's love for the sake of broken lives!

For that reason, Easter colors the answer to every question, and can keep us from being distracted by the world's confusion and broken logic. What could be more unfair than crucifixion of Messiah? In Corinthians 10, Paul promised that no matter what the suffering, God provides a way to endure! Faith fertilizes brokenness and death.

*Those who struggle to make world fair will always struggle and feel empty. Those who celebrate Christ will see opportunities God provides for change. Those who look for escape and excuses will always wonder why life seems dark, while those who are faithful always look for the means to be fruitful.*

Rather than debating fairness, justice, sin and death, Jesus came and started digging in the dirt of this earthly garden. The deeper he dug, the more we see that he was the only answer to getting us out of the hole we are in. Despite unfairness of his mission, Jesus ultimately climbed all the way in and died! Planted in the earth (through a death he didn't deserve) he not only identified with the unfairness but gave us an eternal escape.

The point of three years with no fruit is an acknowledgement the tree would likely never bear fruit, yet the gardener was not willing to give up. For all of this broken world, God's grace fills us with new life that changes us to the core, regardless of the pain or joy that is surrounding my life today! God loves despite the lack of a guaranteed response from a sin-filled world.

Jesus affirms life is full of sin and death – it IS a broken world. But through gifts of forgiveness and new life, he has removed the need to question

questions about brokenness. Instead, he simply asks, "Now that I have given you another chance, how will you seek to live?"

*Life is not matter of survival or fame or wealth, what is fair or unfair, but of faith! And so, whatever my abundance or shortage, life is a gift to glorify God and be a blessing for those around me. God has fed me with his love, and that will make every difference in the world.*

A young mother named Susan was dying of cancer. She had three young children and a husband she would not grow old with. A Christian friend tried to encourage her by saying, "you need to accept your cancer as a test of your faith." I imagine that person thought she was offering some sort of help, even though I have no idea what it was. Susan asked her husband, "*What then is the reason for faith? That would mean if I had no faith, God wouldn't have tested me with cancer? Am I being punished because I have faith and if I didn't believe would God have kept me healthy?*"

What had happened was not a test and was unfair. And yet faith became more powerful than wallowing in suffering. In the same way a young woman named Susan allowed her faith rather than unanswerable questions to be a light to everyone around her.

With such assurance, let faith and not an obsession with fairness be the goal, the fertilizer, and the light of your life. When Jesus said "let it grow" he was talking about gifts like faith and grace that he has planted in our lives. For those are the seeds that bring the undeserved but life changing miracle of peace! Amen.