

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**  
**Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

**March 7, 2010**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent**

Isaiah 55:1-9

1Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without price.

2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
    and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
    and delight yourselves in rich food.

3Incline your ear, and come to me;  
    listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
    my steadfast, sure love for David.

4See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
    a leader and commander for the peoples.

5See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
    and nations that do not know you shall run to you  
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
    for he has glorified you.

6Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
    call upon him while he is near;

7let the wicked forsake their way,  
    and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,  
    and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
    nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

9For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
    so are my ways higher than your ways  
    and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Luke 13:1-9

1At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them — do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

6Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'

### **"Turn It Around"**

**Here we are in March. It is time for the madness. March madness that is. Yes, basketball. I cannot help but remember my basketball career. Such that it was. It probably does not surprise you that I had a very, as I call it, "short lived basketball career." So short-lived that it never made it past the 5<sup>th</sup> grade!**

**Like most kids I wanted to participate in everything that I could. I went out for the basketball team. With vision only in one eye and no three dimensional vision I was challenged from the get go. Yet, I went out for the team, attended the practices, and at the games—well, I secured a good spot on the bench.**

**I remember well the coach. His name was Mr. Flynn. He was also our history teacher in middle school. I don't know if it appropriate to say, but the reality was he did not seem real well suited in history and his ability to discipline a classroom left something to be desired. Basketball was where his passion always seemed to be.**

**As a coach he was a screamer. All through the practices after school he would shout and holler. It got to the point that he shouted so much he**

could just as well have been talking in lower voice. The shouting became the normal pitch such that it did not stand above anything else. After all we were 5<sup>th</sup> graders, how much skill was there at that age.

I can recall what he shouted throughout each game. His mantra was, “Turn it around.” He said it over and over and over again. “Turn it around. Turn it around.” It was not that he was shouting to me. Remember I was on the bench.

Then one day, after all the shouting, as the mantra echoed in my psych—“turn it around, turn it around,”—I heard it. I heard it for me. “Turn it around. Turn it around.” I would never be Larry Bird. “Turn it around.” For me it became the message that my basketball career had come to an end. It was time for me to get off the bench and go participate in something where I would do more than weigh down the bench.

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“Turn it around.” It seems that it could be the silent shout for that fig tree. Here the tree was in the garden and it was taking up space, soil nutrients, and moisture. It was producing no fruit. Get rid of it. Chop it down. Make way for something that bears fruit. It is the sensible, logical, prudent thing to do. It is seemingly, a no brainer.

As the story goes that Jesus tells such is not the way things progress. The owner of the garden is ready to do away with the non fruit bearing fig tree. The gardener is not. The gardener pleads for one more year and commits to tilling the soil, fertilizing, and tending to the tree.

The gardener has hope for the tree and commits himself to working in such a way that increases the chances that the tree will bear figs.

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**Jesus tells this story in the context of repentance. He brings to mind two current events that are on the minds and hearts of the listeners. The one story raises the ire of those listeners. It is the story of Galileans who were mowed down by Pilate. Remember that Pilate was hostile and that manifested itself in his murderous ways. They were not, however, merely murdered; their blood was mingled with the blood of the animals that were sacrificed. It was a heinous and sacrilege thing to do. Then there was also tower near the pool of Siloam. We would presume that tower was part of the wall, and that it fell. When it fell it took out 18 people.**

**The general belief of people in that day was that those killed at the hand of Pilate and those killed at the falling of the tower must have done something that caused such terrible events to befall them. There was a notion of causality. They must have, in some way, sinned and such was the result of their sin. Oh, we still have that kind of thinking going on. Do you remember some of the sick stories that came out from wacked out quasi-Christian groups following 911? Do you remember some of those accusations that this had happened to our country because of some supposed immorality?**

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**Jesus says, “No, I tell you—you need to repent You need to repent so that you do not perish as they did.” The call of the story is to repent. The call of the story is to, as Mr. Flynn shouted, “turn it around.” That is the literal meaning of the word repent—to turn around.**

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**I cannot help but think about Chelsea and her parents. Oh how horrible for Mr. and Mrs. King. To have lost their daughter in such a horrible way. I know earlier in the week when they were searching for her**

**I so hoped that they would find her alive. But deep inside I knew what the predicted outcome would be. It was how these terrible things happen.**

**A young girl disappears and there is a sex offender too. And it seemingly ends up the same way all too often. I cannot imagine the pain that the King family is feeling today. I know that there have been so many others that have had to go through that same pain. I cannot imagine it for any of them. I cannot conceive of how terrible it must truly be.**

**Chelsea did not do anything to deserve such demise. It was not her parents fault—there is not some deep and dark secret about her parents that caused this to happen to their daughter. And yet there is at the same time this old call from Jesus to those listening that day and to us today: “No I tell you, repent.”**

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**Why? Why repent? Does the repenting prevent the Chelseas and towers and Galileans from being cut down? Does the repentance prevent the horrors of the night?**

**No. I do not believe it does. I believe it is just because of the horrors of this age that repentance is the issue. It has to do with urgency. It has to do with the timing.**

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**Oh yes, basketball. I could have continued to go to those practices. I could have continued to be on that team. I could have continued to keep that bench warm through all the games. “Turn it around.”**

**It was the same as that call of Jesus to repentance. There is an urgency to the time. Make it count. Turn it around—orient yourself to the call of God. Orient yourself—re-orient yourself to what counts and what matters.**

**We get so off course and it takes the Chelsea, and the towers, the Jesuses to turn us around to what matters. God's call is to love and justice. God's orientation for us is on of grace and mercy. God's eye is upon us to open us to see that we are held, loved, kept, called, and sent—it is what we are supposed to see.**

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**And according to the story it is not too late.**

**The tree-that fig tree there in the garden bore no fruit. And it could be cut down, but "No, wait," says the gardener. "Let me do some work. Let me help it along." That gardener is the God we know. God is the gardener who attends to us. God is the gardener who is at work on us. God is the one who there to help us to "turn it around" so that we come into ourselves as we were created and called to be.**

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**It is not too late. Those places in our lives that are not bearing fruit. Those places in our lives where we are just sitting on the bench and watching it all pass by—it is not too late. Now is the time.**

**It is the bread and cup physical reminder of this table. That every time we eat and drink here we proclaim the one who calls us back. We proclaim him as the one who calls us into our best, who calls us into discipleship—he is the one who calls us to turn it around to change our lives and live fully in the love of God.**

**Are you sitting on the bench? Or are you ready to get out there on the court? Amen.**