

REFLECTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart

The bush is on fire, but it is not burning anything. Moses is fascinated with that. Have you ever watched a campfire, a fireplace or a candle with fascination? Do you know anyone who has? What is so fascinating about flames? What is so fascinating about our God? Moses is getting a second chance at greatness. He would actually rather stay where he is, with the flocks at Midian, but Yahweh has greater plans for him. Have you ever been given a second chance? Did you feel relieved? Did you feel burdened? What happened? Did you need a third chance?

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Scriptural context – Parables

The parable of the unproductive fig tree at the end of today's passage is not a straightforward story with a clear message. Indeed, this is a hallmark of the style of storytelling that we call 'parable'. A parable is deliberately open to interpretation at different levels. In the first instance, today's parable is a simple farming story. However, the original audience knew (as we know) that there had to be more to the story. Parables use metaphoric and symbolic language that invites the listener or reader to explore deeper and find a meaning that lies beyond the literal.

Living the Gospel – Bad Things / Good People

Today's gospel taps in to the vexing question: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' The question implies that God is punishing good people. Surprisingly, this attitude continues and one only has to watch news coverage of a tragedy to hear someone ask, 'How could God let this happen?' The very question suggests a belief in a God who interferes in our lives and manipulates events. Jesus suggests that tragic events are not punishment from God, but the accidental, deliberate or natural event does provide a reminder to turn our lives around and live lives that matter.

Gospel Focus – Repent

Throughout the gospels, Jesus challenged the prevailing 'purity codes' that separated and classified people. The Jewish religious officials of the day were obsessed with the 'letter of the Law' as it applied to purity observance. Jesus told them that a spirit of compassion was much more important than the blind adherence to the Law. He suggests that it is not the lack of observance of purity codes that makes a person 'unclean' or 'sinful'; rather, it is lack of compassion informing their actions towards others. The call to 'repent' is a call to complete conversion of heart – to take on an attitude of compassion.

Questions for Adolescents

Q. What is the connection between the parable of the fig tree and the preceding conversation?

Q. What values underlie a belief that bad things only happen to bad people?

Q. How have 'good' people you know coped with bad things happening in their lives?

Q. How would you answer someone who asked, 'Why does God let bad things happen to good people?'

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