

Threat or Promise?

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Scriptures: Isaiah 55:1-9

55:1 Ho, 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.

55:2 Why 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.

55:3 Incline 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.

55:4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

55:5 See, 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.

55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

55:7 let 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.**

55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

55:9 For 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

13:1 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

13:2 He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

13:3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

13:4 Or 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?"

13:5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

13:6 Then 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.

13:7 So 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?'

13:8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.

13:9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Proclamation of the Word

I do not know about you, but when I hear Jesus talking about repentance and judgment I want to move on, skip to the good parts.

I like when Jesus is all softness and light, grace and peace.

I am drawn to Jesus the Good Shepherd, the one who gathers little children at his feet.

I love when Jesus no longer calls us servants, but friends.

I want to hear the good news of salvation as we sang in the opening hymn.

But when I read Luke 13 and hear "unless you repent, you will all perish" I am prone to skip ahead. Jesus will not let us do that.

In this season of Lent, Christians are called to self-examination.

We are to repent of our sin and prepare for the life God intends for us.

Part of our preparation for the death, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus, is to get our lives in order.

What I hear as a threat from Jesus just may be a promise.

Which do you hear in these teachings, threat or promise?

Last week I had the privilege of study leave and time to soak up new learning.

Thank you, Fort Hill.

Surprisingly I learned a new way of thinking about repentance.

It was like a refreshing fountain of water to my parched soul- a gift of God's grace.

I hope you will find it helpful, too.

The Enneagram (not angiogram)- one of those tools based on personality types that helps us grow. You may have used this in a counseling setting.

Christians use this ancient tool as a way to realize our full God-given potential.

Being as healthy and whole as possible, we can bear good fruit like that fig tree.

In the same way, repentance is about coming to terms with our truth and being honest before God, asking God to redeem us.

This way we can flourish, not just exist, like some half-dead fig tree.

Our faith tradition teaches us that we cannot know God until we know ourselves.

These experiences are interdependent.

But some of us learned in the faith that we are not to think too much of ourselves (sin of pride) or be self-absorbed.

That is just sinful, right?

But if we are not self-reflective and do not turn to God to help us grow, we can become lost, wither, and eventually perish.

The warning from Jesus is that we will all die, but we can be fruitful with his help,
bearing fruit of repentance and new life now!
Jesus is saying, "Life's short! Get busy being really alive." Now is the time!

Followers of Jesus have a growth mentality.
A part of our mission is to grow disciples.
Whether we are a Clemson student or middle age or beyond,
we are learning as disciples of Christ.
We cannot know God without knowing ourselves.

Augustine- "Lord, let me know myself that I may know thee."
Calvin- "Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God."

Enneagram is one tool of many that helps us know ourselves.
Maybe we are still learning that you and I am made in the image of God.
Each of us has worth and something unique to contribute to our family, our neighborhood, our church,
this city.
(Mary Morrison has been trained in this, so you can talk to her to learn more.)

To be honest, we each learned a way to behave in such a way that worked for us.
Each type has strengths, but also has a particular sin that besets you, a particular temptation.ⁱ

But what intrigues me more is not just how God can redeem our sins,
but how God can redeem our story, so that we can know salvation and healing.
And as we find wholeness and peace, we can be a part of God's redeeming work in the world.

Ian Morgan Cron is an Episcopal priest and a psychotherapist.ⁱⁱ
He contends that knowing yourself through the Enneagram is another way to know your story.
Real change happens when we do the work of self-examination.
And once you know that story, God can redeem the part that you learned that is untrue.
God wants us to be like a fruitful fig tree, to thrive, not just exist or get chopped down.

We cannot change the facts of our lives, but we can learn to interpret them differently.
A child will think "I am what you say I am" and we all get stuck with the negative messages we have
lived more than the positive messages.

For instance if a child experienced his father lavishing praise on him when he excelled at sports and
hears disappointment in his mother's voice when he brings home a B- then what the child hears, "If I
want to be loved, I must succeed."

This becomes that person's story.

That story helped the child survive and have a sense of identity.

But if you carry that into your adulthood, it eventually will not work.

The Enneagram helps us understand your story and reveals the lie of it.

At the prayer of confession you will sometimes hear the pastor recite 1 John 1:8:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us.”

So in order to repent, we have to learn a new story= God's story, the gospel.

We move from untruth to truth. And the truth will set us free.

We all have these broken stories that we learned, and Jesus can help mend them.

Here are a few examples:

1- Some of us learned that "it's not ok to make mistakes." The sin of anger befalls this type.

Do you believe that? It is not true.

2- "I have a need to meet the needs of other because it's not ok to have my own needs." The sin of pride comes to play because that person assumes they know best.

7-This type learned "No one is going to be there for you. Don't depend on anyone or anything." That sin causes us to deal with our fear and lack of trust.

Cron says, "Through eyes of faith, every story is in direct opposition to the story of God. They are lies and are works based with no grace. These are the stories we need to repent of."

Those stories may have helped you and I through childhood, but God is about redeeming our stories. A time comes when we put away childish things.

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; but when I became an adult, I put away childish things." (I Corinthians 13:11)

Hear the good news! God gives us second chances to produce good growth.

The gardener Jesus intervenes before the fig tree is chopped down and says,

"Let's give it another chance."

He digs around it, and fertilizes it with manure.

Have you ever thought of the growth process as painful?

Repentance can be hard, and it might involve lots of manure.

The other option is to perish.

Now while I have always heard repent or perish as a threat,

I can now hear that as promise. Can you?

God wants to teach us the true story.

God reveals God's purposes for our lives, and desires that we bear good fruit- fruit that is nutritious and life-giving. Like we read the prophet Isaiah inviting us,

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

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.(Isaiah 55:1-3a)

The glory of God is a human being who is fully alive wrote the church father, Irenaeus.

This Lenten journey to the cross is ultimately about rising with Christ in a resurrection life, to be fully alive to the glory of God.

Then why do we spend so much on things that do not give life- when the mercy of God, the story God invites us into, is so rich?

Jesus says unless you repent, you will perish.

Maybe we are not even aware that we are like a half-dead fig tree.

We have been doing ok, managing, getting by.

But God invites us to live- to be saved now and forever by God's mercy and grace.

God redeems our stories and places us in God's ongoing story according to Ian Cron.ⁱⁱⁱ

He offers us another way to think about it saying we are living in broken stories.

(3) For those who believe, "I am what I do. That's how I find love in the world."

Here 's a new story- you are loved for who you are. You are fearfully and wondrously made.

(5) For those who live in fear and anxiety and who learned "It's not ok to feel too comfortable."

Now you learn that your needs are not a problem. God gives in abundance. Scarcity is a lie. You can be generous as God is.

(8) For those who believe it's not ok to be vulnerable or to trust anyone. You start to hear you will not be ultimately betrayed. You can risk being vulnerable.

We don't lose our core personality, but the broken story is redeemed.

For those who follow Jesus Christ, we believe in confessing our sin- the truth of our flawed and broken stories.

We also believe that God's grace is sufficient.
We hear the declaration of forgiveness and actually believe it.
Then we begin to live more fully as God intends.

So think about it...

Repentance and judgment then begins to sound like the promise it is,
and not a threat.

Because Jesus is the gardener who will not give up on us.
He will root out the dead parts and fertilize us for growth.
It may take a lot of manure, but the promise will bear good fruit!

Hear this good news.

“We all die so hurry up,” says Jesus, “repent and live the fullness of life God promises now!”

ⁱ Ian Morgan Cron, “Our Shadow Side,” on *Qideas*, qideas.org/videos/our-shadow-side/

ⁱⁱ Ian Morgan Cron, “Is Your Story True? Exploring Narrative through the Enneagram,” *Typology*. Podcast audio, March 7, 2019 <https://www.typologypodcast.com/podcast/2019/07/03/episodes02-032>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.