Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today’s story takes place as Jesus is on his final journey where he goes up to Jerusalem as he has he face set on not going up to Jerusalem but to go up on the cross and then up to heaven. Luke’s gospel along with Paul’s letter to the people of Corinth, both serve as a reminder humans have long looked to divine wrath as the reason for our human sufferings—whether it’s Pilate’s atrocity, where he may have killed Galileans against Rome or a tower collapsing in Siloam, where folk may have been working for the Romans building an aqueduct, or natural disasters or events in our modern era such as the holocaust, 9/11 or tsunami or fires in the Palisades in California, just to name a few. The Pharisees were against using force to deal with Rome and might say the Galileans that Pilate had killed to die deserve to die because of rebellion. The Zealots, which was a group of anti-Rome terrorists may have said they deserve to die because their building of the tower of Siloam was in cooperation with Rome. Especially since 9/11, the sentence in Luke about the **tower of Siloam** calls us to refrain from blaming the victims of tragedy. God’s ways are not our ways. The human desire to find a reason for suffering often leads to conclusions that Christianity cannot support theologically. And of course, it begs the question of why do bad things happen to good people. Jesus reacts to these by trying to re-orient our perspective. We try not to assign blame to these tragic events, but to look at our own actions and how we cause suffering in our lives and for those around us. If a person is killed in a tragic accident or survives in what medical people calls a miracle this is not a measure of righteousness. We all will die-two things you cannot escape is death and taxes (mindful this being tax season). There is no definition for repent since the people understood of that time knows what it means. You may be surprised to learn the word repent in the Greek New Testament simply means to turn around. It was a military term describing a soldier marching in one direction and doing an about-face, 180-degree turn. They were marching in one direction and decided to turn around a go another. Perhaps there was a cliff ahead and they would go over the cliff. It’s important that we clearly understand what repentance really means. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words help us understand repentance. The first is the word *nacham*, which means to turn around or to change your mind. The second is the word sub. It is used over 600 times in the Old Testament and is translated by such words as “turn,” “return,” “seek,” or “restore.” You often see it in phrases like “to turn to the Lord with all your heart.” In the New Testament, we need to know the Greek word metanoia, which literally means “to change the mind.” And Repentance fundamentally means to change your mind about something. It has to do with the way you think about something. You’ve been thinking one way, but now you think the opposite way. That’s repentance — the changing of the mind. That is because they understand it to mean Jesus’ call to repentance is not given as a way to avoid divine retribution, but as a recognition that we have strayed from the ways God has shown us that lead to the flourishing of life for all creation. In the Old Testament the prophets came to remind the kings God had asked them to go straight and take care of his people but power changes humans and the kings went to the left or to the right and did what they wanted, which was to put themselves first to the detriment of most others. They were self-serving instead of helping those God holds near and dear to his heart: the sick, the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the other. The ones we focus on serving with a mind to serve Christ. Until the last king from the line of David that God gave us Jesus reminds us that sometimes the change we long for begins with *us*. Lent is an invitation to return to the Lord our God and align our ways to God’s ways, as we contemplate where we are in our relationship with God and Christ. Soon Jesus himself, like some Galileans, will die at the hand of Pilate. Of course, is the beloved Son of God’s death was not from the wrath of God but was part of God’s plan. Although the passage includes the commonplace religious idea that God punishes sinners, Luke’s rendition of the fig tree stresses instead divine mercy. Luke has a constant theme of forgiveness. We are granted yet another year: be glad for the Master Gardner, Jesus, that cares for tree and spreads the manure.

* In the Old Testament a fruitful tree was often used as a symbol of godly living. Throughout the Bible, the fig tree is prizes for its sweet fruit and its welcomed broad-leaf shade. Other historic literature also uses the fig tree as especially significant: for example, both Augustine and the Buddha were sitting under a fig tree when they came to their enlightenment. In Luke’s parable, the gardener is surprisingly merciful to the unproductive fig tree. Fig trees typically start bearing fruit 3-5 years after planting, depending on the variety.
* The growth process includes distinct stages: establishment (1-2 years), vegetative growth (1-3 years), flowering, and fruit development.
* Environmental factors like temperature, sunlight, and soil conditions significantly influence fig tree health and fruit output.
* Consistent care, including watering, pruning, and fertilizing, enhances fruit production and tree vitality.
* It is necessary to be patient when growing a fig tree. The fig tree being in the garden would suggest to 1st-century Jews the tradition of describing Israel as God’s vineyard.

The good news is the Master Gardner tends to u. In the same way we should be patient with our faith community and with ourselves. The gardener knows just what the fig tree needs. What good news that God knows just what we need too and has sent first his Son and then his Spirit to attend to u! It is good news it is that we don’t have to be on the same timeline as everybody else as we are transformed by the gospel. Every day we can turning away from sin and focus on God and Christ (in him by him, with him) with the help of the Spirit to resist temptation.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians where idol worship in Corinth was commonplace. They was a lot of pressure and temptation to fall into this sin. The original Christian use of the Hebrew Scriptures held the first Testament is interpreted as proclaiming the same divine mercy as was embodied in Christ. The church fathers wrote of Isaiah’s reference to water, wine, and bread as helping Christians reflect on baptism and eucharist, and Paul describes the history of Israel using Christian vocabulary of baptism and spiritual food and drink. Paul believes that Christians have been incorporated into God’s pattern of mercy, thus allowing Christians to use Jewish history, legend, and poetry to point to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Paul writes 13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. Many have turned this into “God will not give you more than you can handle.” When I worked as a Chaplain at a Behavior Health Clinic and asked people who tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide if this is true and they all said no. It instead God will not give you more temptation than you can handle and you can turn to him to get through any temptation. God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear and will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. Lent is a good time to reflect on turning back to God.Isaiah gives a call for all who hunger and thirst to come to the waters and find the abundance our God provides. During Lent we do worship and devotion and prayer and have a Lenten discipline of service and generosity, as we collect items for the food pantry and to help the homeless. Amen.