

3 Lent

March 24, 2019

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses is chosen by God to bring Israel out of Egypt.

Psalms 103:1-11

God redeems our life.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

God is faithful.

Luke 13:1-9

Parable of the fig tree that did not bear fruit.

My childhood home was on two acres of land, with a large field beside and behind our home. On the edge of that field was our 'burning barrel'. A few times a week our dad would have us help him "burn the papers". We would dump all of our waste baskets into the burning barrel. And now the fun part. We pumped our own gas to use in our car. Next to our garage we had a big gasoline storage tank, with a crank pump on it.. When you hung the hose back onto its bracket, the hose had gasoline in it. Do you see where I'm headed here?

Part of the ceremony of burning the papers included pouring some gas out of the hose into a cup, and pouring it on the papers. Then dad would throw a match into the barrel.

When I got a little older, I got to 'burn the papers'. Now, over a period of time, I got more and more used to the small explosion that happened when the match was thrown into the burning barrel. I started to add more gasoline.

One day I came back into the house from burning the papers, and my mom asked me what had just happened. In my most innocent, teenage voice I asked, "What do you mean?" Mom saw that my eyebrows were almost gone, and the hair on my head was singed. I had been flirting with great danger. This was danger of a physical kind – but of course we can find ourselves flirting with danger in our finances, or relationships, or in our spiritual life.

Moses saw the burning bush that was not consumed. God was sending him to Pharaoh to set free the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses knew the power of Pharaoh, and the great danger he would be flirting with by taking on this assignment. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" But God assured him that he would not be alone. God would give him what he needed.

Paul wrote to one of his startup churches: they were flirting with great danger of a spiritual kind. They saw their Christian faith, their spiritual gifts, the sacraments they practiced, as forms of good luck charms. With their faith

and gifts and sacraments on their side, God would protect them against any harm. They could flirt with a little pagan worship now and then. They knew there was only one real god, so what could it hurt?

Paul wrote that these temptations were taking them in a direction they needed to not go. Each step is cumulative. The first steps might be fun or exciting, but they were throwing more and more gas into the burning barrel.

Jesus told a parable about a fig tree that did not bear fruit. Now with parables, it's important that we get all the players assigned. The players are; the fig tree, which is? (us); the vineyard lord? (God); and the gardener? (Jesus). Translating the parts, God intended to throw away what did not bear fruit. But Jesus intervened, and asked for more time to help make the plant (us) productive.

This is a story of encouragement: for us to not let the pains and evils and temptations of life consume us. We should turn to Jesus because he is the gardener who buys us more time, and wants to make us fruitful.

He calls us to be watchful when we are flirting with great danger of a spiritual kind. His call is for us to remember that as Christians, we live our lives like Moses - on Holy Ground – we are always in his presence; he never leaves us unattended. When we feel like we are being tested, we need to remember that God always provides a way out; and God never expects us to endure more than we are able to.

Our purpose in life is to bear fruit, and to learn to keep our eyes on Jesus the gardener to keep us strong.

May God help us through our temptations and hardships; to fully appreciate that nothing separates us from God. We live on Holy Ground, in God's presence. And our Lord Jesus offers us growth in strength, and trust, and hope.

Amen.