

Sermon Title: "Repentance, Justice, and the Grace of Another Year"

- *Isaiah 55:1–9 and Luke 13:1–9 – preached at Sawston, St Mary 23rd March 2025*

Isaiah 55.1-9

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.

Why do you spend your money for that which is
not bread,
and your labour 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.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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

Luke 13.1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them,

‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.’

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. 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?”

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He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

Repentance, Justice, and the Grace of Another Year

Isaiah 55:1–9 & Luke 13:1–9

A few years ago, a friend told me how, after hearing about a tragic event on the news, they found themselves asking: Where is God in this? Why does this happen?

It’s a familiar feeling. When disaster strikes—whether in war, natural disasters, or personal loss—our instinct is to search for meaning.

As we were reminded last week – those of us who were here; Karl Barth, the renowned Swiss Reformed Theologian, famously said that Christians should read with one hand on the Bible and the other on the newspaper. Because faith isn’t something we live in isolation. It’s not separate from real life. The gospel speaks into our world—into war and injustice, into the choices of governments and nations, into the everyday struggles of ordinary people.

You’ve heard it said many times We live in uncertain times.

Wars rage in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, and Gaza. Political landscapes shift—some with hope, others with deep anxiety. Misinformation spreads. Divisions deepen. We hear about suffering, about injustice, about disasters, and we find ourselves asking: What does this mean? Where is God in this? How should we respond?

And that’s not a new question. It’s the same one people brought to Jesus in today’s gospel. Some Galileans had been slaughtered by Pilate; a tower had collapsed, killing eighteen people. And the crowd wanted

answers—was this punishment? Had these people done something to deserve it?

Jesus refuses to play that game. He doesn't assign blame or offer easy answers. Instead, he says:

“Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

It's a striking response. Instead of explaining why tragedy happens, Jesus shifts the focus to how we respond.

We often think of repentance in personal terms—anger, greed, jealousy. But in the Bible, metanoia—repentance—is much bigger than that. It's not just about feeling bad for individual sins; it's a radical reorientation toward God's justice.

Jesus isn't just talking about private morality. He's calling people to see the brokenness of the world and turn toward something new.

Because the tragedies in Luke 13 weren't just random events.

- Pilate's massacre wasn't an accident—it was state violence.
- The tower collapse wasn't just misfortune—it likely pointed to poor construction, neglect, corruption.

Jesus is clear: If we don't turn from injustice—if we don't choose another way—we will perish in the same dysfunction that causes suffering in the first place.

And what do we see today?

- Leaders manipulate faith to justify war and division;

- The vulnerable suffering—refugees, the poor, the marginalised; and
- Christian witness being distorted - when faith is used not for love, but for power.

And this isn't just about them. It's about us. Repentance isn't just about grieving injustice—it's about refusing to be complicit in it.

So we ask: What must my faith look like in this moment?

And Jesus doesn't leave us to figure that out on our own: Instead, he tells a story.

A landowner finds a barren fig tree. For three years, it has produced nothing. Frustrated, he wants to cut it down. But the gardener pleads for one more year—time to nurture, cultivate, and restore the tree to fruitfulness.

At first, the parable feels ominous—a warning of judgement. But it is also a moment of grace.

- God's patience is not permission to do nothing. The fig tree must be worked on, not ignored.
- Justice delayed is not justice denied. Corrupt systems may stand for now, but without change, they will fall.
- We are in the 'one more year' moment. This is a time of decision—both for the world and for us.

Repentance isn't, of course, just for politicians or governments. It starts with us.

- Does repentance mean speaking up when a friend spreads a harmful falsehood?
- Does it mean changing how we spend our money or time?

- Does it mean being honest about where we have failed to love, care, and act?

Therefore, this parable isn't about fear—it's about opportunity.

We have been given time. The question is: Will we use it well?

If Jesus calls us to turn back to God and bear fruit, what does that actually look like? What kind of life is God inviting us into?

The prophet Isaiah paints a picture for us.

"Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1

This is God's economy—not built on fear, scarcity, or exclusion, but on abundance, justice, and mercy.

But we know this isn't always how faith is lived out. Too often, instead of reflecting God's justice and mercy, faith gets co-opted for something else entirely. And history has plenty of warnings about what happens when that goes unchecked.

We see it still today.

- The Patriarch of Moscow has justified Russia's war as God's divine will.
- Paula White, senior faith advisor to President Trump, once declared: "To say no to Trump is to say no to God."

But, to be clear: **This is not the way of Christ.**

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** – *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."*

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- **Joshua 5:13-14** – When Joshua asks the angel, “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*” the angel replies, “*Neither*”—because God does not take sides in human conflicts; He calls us to His side.
- **John 18:36** – When Jesus stands before Pilate, he says “*My kingdom is not of this world.*”

Faith must never be twisted to serve human ambition.

And before we rush to condemn others, let’s be honest about the Church itself.

- Have we ever said “God is on our side” in a church dispute?
- Have we ever used “God’s will” to justify our own agenda?

This is why Jesus calls us to repentance (the full reorientation toward God)—not just as individuals – although this is important - but as a church, as a society. Because if we don’t turn back, we risk becoming just another barren fig tree.

But here’s the good news—there is still time.

The world stands at a crossroads. Like the fig tree, we have been given one more year—a season of grace to bear fruit before judgement comes.

So, what will we do with this time?

- Will we turn inward, driven by fear and self-preservation?
- Or will we bear fruit—choosing justice, mercy, and truth?

To be silent in the face of injustice is to be complicit in it.

We must:

- ✓ Resist fear-mongering that pits people against each other.
- ✓ Challenge Christian nationalism that distorts the Gospel into a tool for power.

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✓ Advocate for the marginalised—the refugee, the poor, the oppressed.

Thankfully, we do not do this alone.

God's Spirit moves in us, strengthens us, and leads us into repentance, justice, and grace.

So, here's the challenge:

- Will we keep one hand on the Bible and the other on the world?
- Will we pray with our eyes open?
- Will we be the people who speak up, act, love, and refuse to let fear have the last word?

For we have been given one more year.

What will we do with it?

Amen.