

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
March 3, 2019

## Me? A Friend of All: Requires Unconditional Trust

Luke 13:1-9

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

*<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'*

*<sup>8</sup> "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"*

Last Sunday at the same time as our last worship service, Andrew Schefelker died on Interstate 41 and hundreds of others were involved in that horrible white out. After seeing that wreck, I think all of us would agree: "It is good for us to be here." Safe in a warm and comfortable church.

Was Andrew the most sinful man in Wisconsin that morning? Were those involved in the crash more sinful than all the others driving in that same blizzard who made it home safely?

Is that the lesson we can learn from that accident?

That's how the lesson for today begins. The news feed of Jesus' day announced: Pilate Spills Galilean Blood on Altar. How did most people read that? They probably got what they deserved!

Then Jesus shares another news feed: "Tower in Siloam Crushes 18!" How did people interpret the sign? God must have been really angry with them!



Nearly 40 years ago, that's how many Christians read the newspaper. An epidemic was ravaging the homosexual population. The obvious conclusion? God is really angry with them!

But then that epidemic started to strike hemophiliacs and the heterosexual population. Should we draw the same conclusion? God is really angry with them?

When Jesus read the news feeds of his day, he came to a very different conclusion:

**“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.”**

We can read something into every tragedy that occurs, every epidemic, every earthquake. It is not to make a judgment on others, but first to make a judgment on ourselves.

Unless you repent, you too will all perish.

### **1. Trust God's Justice**

These tragedies announce to us that we too will die. There will come a time when we will stand before the judgment seat of God. When we trust God's justice upon ourselves, it creates humility. I too deserve to die.

But it isn't just us. Every person we interact with is also going to face God's justice someday.

Do you see that truth as you look across a sea of faces at a basketball game? If you do, it creates a sense of urgency. How many of the people we see are prepared for that moment when they stand before God's justice? What am I doing about it? How can I be involved?

### **2. Trust God's Mercy**

After talking about the news feeds of his day that announced God's justice, Jesus told a parable that illustrates God's mercy. The owner of a vineyard sees a fig tree growing there. No fruit. In fact, for three years the result has always been the same. No fruit. What's the use? Cut it down!

But the caretaker pleads for mercy. One more year. Let me work the soil, put some manure around it, take care of it the best that I am able. Be patient and see if it may yet bear fruit. Just one more year!

A simple picture of God's mercy in action. He is patient. He has every right to act in judgment at once. But he is patient. In fact, the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:9 says that is why the end of the world hasn't come yet. God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but that everyone come to repentance.

Isn't that great news for you and me?

How often hasn't God come strolling into the garden of our lives looking for fruit? He walks into your place of business and sees you standing next to your co-worker who is gossiping about another person. He waits. He looks. Surely my child who has experienced my love will defend

that person being gossiped about! He looks and listens. And instead he hears you join in the gossip.

How often hasn't God come strolling through the playground and seen a child who has been forgiven over and over again by their teacher. He looks for fruit. And instead he sees this child start calling another child names.

How often hasn't God opened your Facebook or Snapchat account. He is looking for fruit. But instead he sees loveless words written without care of how cutting they are.

Praise God for his amazing patience! Rather than immediately destroying us, he calls us to repentance. He uses events in our lives to humble us. When we come crawling back to him, he lifts us up and forgives us. "Don't be afraid. I won't judge you on the basis of these actions. I'll judge you on the basis of what Jesus has done in your place. The judgment you deserved, he has accepted in your place. You are forgiven."

We who have experienced that kind of patient mercy, how can we be quick to judge others?

Ok, so your spouse does the same things over and over again and it drives you crazy. They will never change. You are ready to give up!

Your co-worker continues in a sinful heterosexual or homosexual lifestyle. You've shown unconditional love. They know you love them. You have talked about God's forgiving love in Christ. They know you believe their lifestyle is sinful. You've had that discussion over and over again. But they don't change. You are ready to give up!

But what does the Savior say in this parable. In mercy he says, "Give it one more year."

If God hasn't called this person out of this world, God is saying, "In mercy, I am patient with this person."

If God is patient, then let us be persistent. What gives us the right to say, "Now is the time to cut this person down. There is no chance of repentance!" Am I the owner of this vineyard? Do I call the shots of when God's mercy comes to an end?

Trust God's mercy and be persistent. Persistent in your unconditional love. Persistent in your trust in God's unconditional gospel. Persistent, when God gives you the opportunity, of calling this person to repentance.

### **3. Trust God's Word**

"Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it." Sometimes I miss the King James Version. It is so much more down to earth. Lord, let me get my hands dirty and scoop some poop on it.

That's what a caretaker who understands God's justice and who has experienced God's mercy says: "Lord, let me get my hands dirty and scoop some poop on it."

What does that mean in your daily life?

It means using the time God has given us not to judge and condemn, but in humility, with a sense of urgency, be patient and persistent in getting our hands dirty. It means getting close to people and loving them.

Imagine how different our world would be right now if that is how we as Christians had responded to the AIDs epidemic of the 1980's. If the entire LGBTQ community would have known that every church was a hospital for them to enter, to get any physical relief we could offer and get spiritual relief and comfort, would the church be the LGBTQ Enemy #1?

I'm not saying that all those living in a sinful lifestyle would have changed. But rather than get our hands dirty and get involved, the church as a whole stood back in judgment.

And what is true of the LGBTQ community is true of so many who are struggling with sinful life patterns or even people who going through some tough time in their lives. We see people in need and we hesitate. We don't want to get our hands dirty. We don't have the time to show unconditional love.

This week I read *The Gospel Begins with a House Key*, a book by Rosaria Butterfield, the woman that I quoted last week. The book is about radical ordinary hospitality. It is radical because so few people do it. But it is ordinary. It doesn't take a person of special talent to show the kind of hospitality she encourages. She makes the telling statement that for you to show hospitality, to get your hands dirty by showing unconditional love, you have to have build some margin into your life. That convicted me. I'm busy. I'm busy doing God's work. I don't have time to practice hospitality. I've got more important things to do.

Really? The very people who are producing no fruit right now are the ones who need us the most. If we care about those who are producing no fruit, then we need to build some margin into our lives. Let's not book ourselves so tight with sports and music and dance and TV and time with friends, that we have no time for those whom we don't know yet, but people that God may be bringing into our neighborhoods or into our work places or our schools.

So, brothers and sisters, let's get our hands dirty. Let's take the time to show unconditional love... to the people in our own families that are hard to love, and those on the periphery of our areas of influence.

Let's apply the fertilizer. Let's let them experience God's unconditional gospel in action.

And then let's pray for fruit, trusting that God can do the impossible.

Trust the Holy Spirit can give an LGBTQ person a new heart that turns away from a sinful lifestyle. That person may never “change” in the sense that they continue to be attracted to a person of their own gender. But Christ does change us so that we can daily put to death our sinful desires and live for Christ.

Trust that God’s Word can work on your heterosexual family member or friend who is sexually active outside of marriage and change their heart. Be patient. Be persistent. Dig into their lives. Spend time with them. Understand them. Care for them. And then dung them. Not dumping on them for being lousy sinners, but sharing the truth that you have experienced, that God’s justice is real but his mercy is real as well.

Yes, get your hands dirty and pray for fruit.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, I so appreciate Peter’s words: “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” It is good for us to be here, basking in the glory of the Lord. That’s what we get to do here in church. We bask in Jesus’ glory. I am forgiven. I am a child of God. Here my soul finds rest.

But Jesus didn’t let them stay on the Mount of Transfiguration. Right after they went down the mountain, they got their hands dirty. A father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus’ disciples. They couldn’t help him. They brought the boy to Jesus. How long has he been like this? “Since his childhood,” the father answered.

No wonder the disciples couldn’t do anything. It was a hopeless case. Like the LGBTQ person in your mission field. Like your spouse who never changes. Like your son or daughter who is battling an addiction. What’s the use? It is hopeless!

The Father said, “Help him if you can.” Jesus answer, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father responded: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

That is my prayer as we bring this **Me? Friend of All** message series to an end. God has changed me so that I see the LGBTQ community as a mission field. I have learned from the Savior that he is calling me to be the Good Samaritan and care for those who may be very different from me. I have learned to see the prodigal sons and daughters around me through the eyes of my Heavenly Father. I know God’s will for sexual intimacy and that a true, soul-satisfying love can’t be found in illicit sexual activity but only in a close personal relationship with Jesus. I have learned much. But there is still the big question. Will it make any difference? Can a person who may seem so adamantly against Christ be changed?

Jesus’ answer: “Everything is possible for the person who believes.” And so my closing prayer is, “Lord, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.” Amen.

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## My Next Steps to be a Friend to All

- **Watch the news:** Recognize that every disaster or death is a reminder that time is short. Let the news produce in you an urgency. Now is the time to be friend to all.
- **Get your hands dirty:** Pray for God to open your eyes to see the mission field around you and to see ways that you can show unconditional love to those who are producing no fruit of faith now.
- **Apply the fertilizer:** The gospel is what produces fruit. If we want to change and become more loving, then use the Lenten season to apply the gospel to your own heart. Make a commitment not to miss a weekend or Wednesday Lenten service where we celebrate God's mercy to us in Jesus.
- **Review what you have learned:** If this message series has impacted your life, go back and review the messages again. Find them at [www.StPaulMuskego.org/worship/sermons](http://www.StPaulMuskego.org/worship/sermons).

### GroupWork

Mar 3 – Mar 9

“And!”

*Gay and God, pages 50 – 62*

1. What is the most significant thing you have learned in this message series?
2. What have you found most troubling or what like to discuss, especially from the message this week?
3. The author contends that most Christians are “or” people. What is the point of his “and”?
4. Read John 8:1-11. How does this account illustrate Jesus was an “and” person?
5. What is the 14 word summary of the entire book?
6. How can you be an “and” person? What can St. Paul's do to become more of an “and” church? What can you personally do to help bring about that change?
7. Review the outline the author used:  
L \_\_\_\_\_ G \_\_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_\_
8. Break into groups of two or three. If you feel comfortable, share an LGBT individual for whom you are praying. Take turns praying for the individual(s) that another person in your group has mentioned.