

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Third Sunday in Lent; March 24,2019

“Time to Become Whole”

Scripture: Luke 13:1-9; 3 Lent C

Ah, springtime! The brilliant sun shining through the bright-blue skies. Birds, re-emergent after the long dark cold, chirping busily at their work. The chilly air losing some of its bite and hinting of even warmer days to come. I know winter may not be through with us yet, but lately with all the sunshine and milder temperatures, I am involuntarily put in mind of a similar spring I experienced many years ago, probably 15 years ago back in New England, the sun shining, the air shimmering with renewed warmth. It was beautiful.

But don't let that fool you. Because back in the day, the coming of spring meant the return of the little hunters. When the sun came out and the snow melted away and the weather warmed up, they moved in for the kill... loaded with baseballs and bats, tennis balls, soccer balls, basketballs, frisbees, footballs, and boomerangs, hockey pucks and lacrosse sticks... and no window in our home was safe. No shiny, clear, unobtrusive, and lovely pane was secure. And it wasn't just my own little hunters out there... no! They attracted packs of others who brought their own

deadly ordnance, and the destruction would spread unchecked. I remember one particular day's rampage: two windows on the front stoop falling to the single toss of a baseball, one window inside the stoop by the front door (the end of a hockey stick went through that one). One window on the rear of the house demolished; never did know how that happened. One window smashed on the south side basement level, another in the garage. The attack spread even to the neighbor's house, leaving a large window the victim of an errant basketball. (I least I am told it was an errant throw.) And topping it all off: a trash can ---yes, an entire trash can--- left poking through a large pane on the garage door. It was epidemic! No window was safe. And something had to be done.

And you know in my frustration I promised, "That's it! No more balls and bats, no more pucks and sticks, frisbees and footballs. It's over; they're all mine now. Give them to me! You'll never play ball out here again." And I think I was right to be upset about it. Property was being destroyed, and those little neighborhood hunters were carelessly wrecking things for which they had not worked or paid or cared.

But who am I kidding? Ending the athletic careers of the neighborhood kids at an early age was no satisfying solution. Banning my children and their buddies from the premises wouldn't enhance their lives. Besides, there was something else I wanted

from them. And after some time, some parental lecturing, and a little hopefulness on my part, they got another chance; they got their gear back, their baseballs and hockey pucks and other projectiles, and I let their buddies return to play. And I opened a savings account to help replace the windows the following spring.

But you all know what I wanted really. I wanted the children to learn how to respect other people's property. I wanted them to grow in responsibility. I wanted them to take care of things that belonged to them and things that did not. And I looked forward to the day when, a window (or anything else in life) being broken, they would be mature enough and capable enough and responsible enough to do all they could to fix it, to make things as right as they could make it, to accept their responsibility for what was broken even when they could not fix it entirely. And when they couldn't fix things, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with those they had hurt or offended. And I wanted them to learn to do this because they wanted to, because they had come to know it was the right thing to do.

Now, how long will that take to learn? I don't know. But there was that voice from my heart saying, "Wait. Don't give up on these kids yet. Work with them. Teach them. Help them. Love them" And even now I figure that those kids turned

young adults are still working at it. I know I am. How about you? You scoring a perfect record now? You have it all figured out?

Jesus tells the story of a fig tree that bears no fruit. “Cut it down,” commands the landowner. “It’s a fig tree, but it makes no figs. What good is that? Why waste the soil it lives in?” But the caring gardener in this story says, “Wait! Don’t cut it down yet.” The tree needs more time, more nurture, in order to bear fruit. How much time? Who knows? Can the gardener work on it forever? I don’t think I could. But this gardener is not like me, and I don’t doubt the desire or the power of this gardener to work as long as it takes to bring new life out of what appears to be lifeless, new worth from that which appears to be worthless.

I once read that a tree in a newly set fig grove can produce fruit in only a year. One year and it has the power to bear fruit and reproduce life. I read also that not all fig trees do. In fact, the article went on to say that some trees in that grove will produce right away; others will blossom a little later; still others may appear to be of no worth at all. Now, do those early producing fig trees think those other trees are somehow worse than them?... That same article I was reading went on to say that it can take as many as five years for that grove to mature and for all the trees that will produce to start producing. Now, a wise and caring gardener might continue to

nurture those trees, give all those trees a real chance to grow, even if others think they are worthless. Of course, a wise fig tree might do everything in its power to help the gardener... to reach for the sun, to drink in the water, to strengthen its limbs, and spread out its leaves.

Makes me wonder... How long until we blossom as we should? Are we doing everything in our power to help the gardener help us? How long will it take for each of us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? How long until we live up entirely to this faith we claim, loving others as we love ourselves? Well, I guess some of that depends upon us. Reach for the sun (the Son). Drink in the water of faith. Strengthen your spirits in worship. Spread out your lives to serve others. And when we fail?... I'm just grateful that Jesus is like that gardener that says, "Wait. Don't give up on these kids yet. I'll work with them, teach them, help them, love them." And now, in this season of spring, this season of Lent, it's our time to grow.