

The Third Sunday in Lent (Lent 3C)**Isaiah 55:1-9****Luke 13:1-9****March 20, 2022****Pr. Eric L. Murray****St. Andrew, Franklin, TN**

*Love the quick profit,
the annual raise,
vacation with pay.
Want more of everything ready made.
Be afraid to know your neighbor and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery anymore.
Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you.
When they want you to die for profit
they will let you know.¹*

The words of poet, farmer, philosopher, Wendell Berry from his 1973 poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*. Part apocalyptic writer, part Old Testament prophet *Berry's* words like the rush of a mighty river flow over and around us, the waters carrying us along with their images and ideas calling us *to incline our ears, and* listen carefully to the reality of our communal lives.

Wendell Berry's *Manifesto* is a sharp-edged critique of the way we are living as a society. And this way, I think Berry might say, echoing the prophet Isaiah reveals that our thoughts are not God's thoughts, nor our ways God's ways.

¹ "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from *The Country of Marriage*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973. Also published by Counterpoint Press in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*, 1999; *The Mad Farmer Poems*, 2008; *New Collected Poems*, 2012.

No, our current way, according to Berry is the way which values and celebrates individualism consumerism, violence, and death.

Thus, his *Manifesto* calls us to a new way, calls us to *incline our ears and listen, so that we may live.*

In today's gospel reading, we listen in as Jesus makes his closing argument in the case he has been building with his disciples. Up till now he has argued using a series of exaggerated illustrations.

Jesus use of hyperbole—a rich fool, a sluggish servant, a defensive litigant—like the rush of a mighty river, flows over and around Jesus disciples. Each exaggerated example serves as a warning of the ways in which our ways are not God's ways. Examples of how our ways, our current path leads in the direction of destruction and death.

With urgency, Jesus calls his disciples to listen so that they may live, to wake up to the urgency of now, the urgency that what is needed is a change of direction, a turning from our current way to God's way. In other words, according to Jesus, what is urgently needed is ***repentance***.

Ahh, Repentance, such a misunderstood word. Literally it means to "turn around". Figuratively *repentance* has come to mean, ...*to go in a new direction, ...to undergo a "change of mind or heart", ...to "re-shape one's life."*

For the Evangelist Luke, repentance is key to Jesus message throughout the gospel. In today's reading, Jesus is seeking to convince his disciples to convince us that as a community, as a society, we are following the ways of the rich fool who built bigger and bigger barns to contain his many possessions only to die suddenly without enjoying them; or, the sluggish servant who was not attentive to the coming of his master, and missed out on his

arrival; or, the defensive litigant who refused to seek and give forgiveness and found himself judged in the same way. These exaggerated examples are Jesus way of warning us of the ways which lead only to destruction and death.

But, not because God has judged us and has sought to punish us. Like the Galileans whom Pilate executed while they worshiped or the workers killed when the tower fell on them, our errant ways do not bring upon us God's judgment. But, unless we change our ways, Jesus warns, we will bring upon ourselves our own destruction and death.

Jesus is seeking to make the case for repentance, for a new path, one that rejects the way of individualism consumerism, violence, and death. Jesus is calling for repentance, a new direction, a new way, one that follows God's way of life, true life.

In the second stanza of his poem, Wendell Berry seems to echo Jesus' call, countering the conclusion which the poem's first stanza reached. The first stanza concluded:

When they want you to die for profit they will let you know.²

To the first stanza's way of death, the second stanza answers with the alternative, the second stanza turns around in a new direction, the way of life, saying...

*So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.*

² Wendell Berry, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, from

*Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.*

*As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.*

*Practice resurrection.*³

Wendell Berry's alternative way seems counter intuitive, because we are so accustomed to the way of individualism consumerism, violence, and death.

But, Berry's call, which is really echoing Jesus' call is to community, stewardship, peace-making and love.

Berry's call is to a new way, a way of radical humility, simplicity, and community, to living peaceably and honoring life even in its smallest forms, to doing honest work and considering how one's actions impact other people, animals, and the natural world.

When our ways align with God's ways and our thoughts with God's thoughts this is the fruit we will bear, the good life we will live.

And, according to Jesus, it is of utmost urgency that we bear this fruit.

³ Wendell Berry, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, from

All we need do is turn on the news coming out of Russia and Ukraine to see a contemporary example of the two paths laid out before us, the path that leads to destruction and death and the path that follows God's way the path that leads to life, true life.

This is the reality of our world. This is what is at stake. This is what has always been at stake.

Jesus calls us to bear the fruit of true life, to counter the way of individualism consumerism, violence, and death. with beloved community, faithful stewardship, non-violent peace-making and love.

In other words, Jesus calls us to practice resurrection, to practice what is life-giving. To take the life which, by grace God has given us, which by grace, God has tended life a master gardener, and to bear the fruit which God has caused to grow, and share that life for the sake of the world.

And God promises that this good life which God is causing to grow, this way which is God's way, these thoughts which are God's thoughts, God promises this way will be ours, will be the world's. Because, as God declares, Now is the time of grace, now is the day of salvation. turn now and seek God's face, now behold God's invitation God's invitation to incline our ears, and come to God, listen and live.