

# In His Place



*Putting our hearts in Jesus' heart; our hands in Jesus' hands; moving beyond thinking into the realm of doing*

## *Seeing through Jesus' eyes*

Following Sept. 11, 2001, the Southeast Asia tsunami and Hurricane Katrina there were some who said that the victims deserved to die because they were sinners and were receiving divine punishment for their sins.

Read Luke 13:1-5, what does Jesus say about people deserving to die?

There is a common belief that is referred to as the doctrine of retribution. This doctrine states that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. So when something like natural disasters and Sept. 11 occur some people immediately think that the people on whom disaster befell must have done something to deserve it. But Jesus denies this doctrine in a discussion with his listeners by comparing people who had just sacrificed at the temple to people killed when the tower they were in collapsed.

Who could be holier than someone who has just confessed their sins, repented and prayed to God? Yet this is what the Galileans had just done when they were slaughtered by Pilate's troops at the Temple. Between their time of sacrifice and their slaying what could they have done to deserve to be killed and their blood "mingled with their sacrifices"? This would be similar being killed right after communion.

Jesus then talks about people killed when the tower they were in collapsed. Again, they did not die because of something they did but because catastrophe can strike at any time. And Jesus tells his listeners to repent before catastrophe could strike in their lives and it is too late to get right with God.

Read Luke 13:6-9, what do you have to do with the fig tree?

How many of you remember the childhood song "Little Bunny Food-Food"? The bunny hops through the forest finding field mice and then "bopping" them on the head. The good fairy comes down and gives Food-Food three chances with the threat of becoming a goon if the bunny doesn't stop bopping the field mice on their heads. Finally Food-Food is turned into a goon.

The vineyard owner has given the fig tree three chances (or years) to bear fruit and so far it hasn't so he's going to get rid of it.

Yet a worker talks the owner into giving it one more year and the worker promises to give more care to the tree in hopes of it bearing fruit.

This is what Jesus did for us, Jesus gave us "one more year" to repent and bear fruit for God. In Methodist theology, we talk about showing evidence of accepting the Holy Spirit and living our lives on the path of God as the "fruits of the Spirit."

Recently the church as a whole has displayed its "fruits of the Spirit" through its Gulf Coast rebuilding efforts. Through our apportionments and special donations we have funded the United Methodist Committee on Relief, which is still working with churches across the country to help clean up homes in the Gulf Coast. Because we know that a disaster can strike anybody at any time, we work to help when a helping hand is needed. Because it is what Jesus would do.

**Third Week  
of Lent  
(Year C)**

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

# We are all equal in the eyes of God and Jesus

## Isaiah 55:1-9

God calls everybody to come to the waters and drink, everyone who hungers to eat. It is easy to hear God saying all those who come “Your money’s no good here. This is a feast open for everybody.”

Yet too often not everybody is given this invitation to a banquet. Howard Thurman remarked that 11 a.m. Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in the United States. One of Thurman’s students was Martin Luther King Jr., yet when we look around at churches across the country many of them are still segregated. The famous study of African American children picking which doll was better was recently repeated by a student doing a documentary and sadly the results showed the children still thought the white doll was the “good” doll, the one they wanted to be like.

We have come a long way legally since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, yet we still have a long way to go.

“Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over the other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others,” is our official statement on racism. We also recognize that racism is both a personal and institutional problem.

Legislation and Affirmative Action have been positive steps toward all of us eating God’s banquet together. Yet personal racism still keeps most churches segregated. “Racism plagues and cripples our growth in Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. White people are unfairly granted privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life.”

We are called to be one family in Christ and that means that no body is privileged over anybody else based on flesh and bone.

¶ 162-A, Book of Discipline

## Becoming disciples

### Monday

Read Isaiah 55:7 and Luke 13:6-9. One contains a call to repentance and the other talks about giving us one more chance to repent. Why is it that we don’t repent immediately but have to be given multiple opportunities to come into relationship with God?

### Tuesday

Read Proverbs 9:5 and Isaiah 55:1-5. Compare the invitation to God’s banquet with the invitation to Wisdom’s banquet. What does it mean to take part in a holy banquet?

### Wednesday

Read Exodus 32:6 and 1 Corinthians 10:7. What is a common practice that is missing in the description of action of the people who are being admonished? Why would neglecting this practice be an allusion to idolatry? Hint: What is the first

## 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

“Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons.”

Paul writes to the Corinthians to warn them that they are risking God’s wrath and includes a “vice list” that serves to differentiate the Christian Corinthians from the pagan Corinthians that surround them. In the list is included idolatry, sexual immorality, putting Christ and God to the test and complaining.

Of these only one has a Scriptural reference: idolatry in Exodus 32:6, which indicates that this is Paul’s major focus of the passage. Yet some people gloss right past Paul’s emphasis and read “sexual immorality” as a reference to homosexuality.

But this is not what Paul refers to, what Paul is actually writing about is a man living with his father’s widow. (1 Cor. 5:1)

The Book of Discipline states that this is a “clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims ... Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against gays and lesbians. We also commit ourselves to social witness against the coercion and marginalization of former homosexuals.”

We are called to accept people who are different than us. Yet we often try to distance ourselves from those we think are “other,” whether the differences be economic, racial or sexual.

God welcomes “those who thirst” to come and drink at the banquet; Jesus ate dinner with taxpayers, prostitutes and sinners. Who are we to deny what God and Jesus have freely offered because it makes us uncomfortable?

“Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and with self.”

¶ 162-H and 161-G, Book of Discipline

commandment?

### Thursday

“We are called on not to mirror but to challenge culture, not to sustain but to upend the status quo, and if that to some sounds overly bold, isn’t it true that God is always beckoning us toward horizons we aren’t so sure we want to reach?” — William Sloane Coffin

What does this mean to you? What are some of the horizons that God has beckoned us to in the past? What are the horizons we are currently being beckoned toward?

### Friday

“We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.” — “Our Social Creed,” paragraph 4, from Book of Discipline 2004, page 125.

## Prayer

### Morning

Dear God, we worship you with joy, gladness and singing each day. Thank you for taking care of us in troubled times. Amen.

### Evening

Almighty God, you are gracious to all of your people whether we pray to you constantly or not. Help us to care for people who have been struck by disaster in the same way you care for us. Helps us realize that we are all the same in the eyes of God whatever our differences may be in our eyes. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

### Psalm reading

Psalm 63:1-8

Write down a phrase that sticks out to you in the morning and carry it with you throughout the day. Think about it when you can.

If you are doing journaling write your thoughts about the phrase at night.

Pick a new phrase each day.