

**Sunday March 23, 2025**  
**Third Sunday of Lent**

**Meditation:** “Theodicy”

Theodicy – if God is all good and all powerful, then why is there evil?

Rabbi Harold Kushner – When Bad Things Happen To Good People

Dad’s cancer diagnosis – why me?

People are great at asking difficult questions; questions to which there are no simple answers, and yet we want answers, and we don’t want to have to think too hard about those answers. We want the answers to our questions to be understandable. We want them to make sense and satisfy us. We want them to be simple. Yet we don’t ask simple questions. I remember as a child listening to comedian George Carlin. “If God is all powerful,” he asked, “can God make a stone so big that God cannot lift it?” What is the answer to that question? Either apparent simple answer means that God is not all powerful. The problem is that it is a foolish question. Perhaps that is why we don’t get the answers we want to the questions we ask. Perhaps the real problem is that the questions we ask are foolish. Perhaps we shouldn’t be asking why. Perhaps we should be asking what can we learn from a situation or event, or how can we carry on, or where do we go from here?

Such is the wisdom put forth by Morrie Schwartz in Mitch Albom’s book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Morrie learned that he had been afflicted with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as ALS or Lou Gehrig’s disease. It was a death sentence. Instead of wallowing in self-pity or asking God why, why him, what had he done to deserve such a death sentence, Morrie decided to focus on how to live what little life was left to him, even in the face of impending death. More importantly, Morrie decided to teach his former student, Mitch, about how to live.

When some in the crowd gathered around Jesus asked him about those who Pilate had slaughtered on their way to the temple, I’m sorry, let me sanitize the language; when some in the crowd gathered around Jesus asked him about those whose blood Pilate had mingled with their offerings, they wanted to know

why? Why had God allowed such a thing? What had they done to deserve such an end? Surely their sin must have been great, or God would have prevented it. But Jesus refuses to be drawn into their speculation. Instead, he turns it around on those who brought up the subject, "Unless you repent, you will die as they did." Jesus also reminds those around him of those who died when the tower by the pool of Siloam collapsed on them, "were they worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No," he told them, "but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Does he mean to imply that if we repent we will live forever, and if we don't we will surely die? By no means. That is not Jesus' intention at all. Jesus is saying that unless we repent, when we die, we will be like those who died in the tragedies at the temple and at the collapse of the tower by the pool of Siloam; we will be in a state of estrangement from the Lord our God. And just how much time do we have to repair that relationship? Well, Jesus tells yet another parable.

In the parable of the fig tree, imagine, if you will, that we are the fig tree, the landowner is the world, and the gardener is God. The man sees that the fig tree is not bearing fruit and wants to cut it down because it is taking up soil that could be used for something else that would bear fruit. That sounds harsh doesn't it, and yet I'm sure we've all heard such sentiments spoken by people about other people. Why should we supply the needs of those on welfare, the developmentally delayed, the physically disabled, the homeless, prisoners, the sick, the elderly, the addicted, the mentally infirm; they are nothing but a blight on society and a drag on the economy. Don't just warehouse them, get rid of them. Isn't that exactly what genocide, I'm sorry, ethnic cleansing all about? Getting rid of those who are not like us; those who are taking up space and using up scarce resources that we could have all to ourselves if they weren't here.

But the gardener pleads on behalf of the fig tree. He argues for more time, for yet another chance. He offers to put manure on it and in the process of mixing

in the manure, he will chop up all of the surface roots, driving the tree to put down deeper roots and blossom. In the divine plan, there is, to be certain, a day of reckoning. There is also grace in the extension of time and second chances.

Morrie, even though he didn't know the exact day of his death, he knew it was rapidly approaching, and so he lived as he had never lived before. He lived as though he had been dead up to that point in his life. And he taught Mitch to live each day as though it were the last, because we do not know when our days will end. We do not know when we will go to sleep with our forebears. The time to make our lives right with God, the time to confess our sins, the time to repent, the time to bear fruit for the glory of God, is right now. Today.

Dad's next question was, why not me? Why should I be exempt from the human condition? And, at least now I can stop worrying about what I will die from, assuming nature takes its course – cancer. Indeed, the cancer did get him in the end, albeit decades later. Dad's death is a reminder that none of us know the time or the day that our lives will end. His death is a reminder that each and every day of our lives is a gift from God, and that we should use that gift to God's glory; for just as the fig tree was created to blossom and bear fruit for eating, we are created to praise God and love our neighbours as ourselves. May it be so. Amen.