

How can a God of love...?



We ended last week saying that we live between the trees. We live with the consequences of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and as Christians we move forward to the Tree of life, which reappears in the closing chapter of the Bible, in the new Heaven and new Earth.

If we choose to reject that, and many do, then we have to seek a different way to understand the world we live in. One of the most challenging questions that arises is around the existence of suffering. The question we often hear is: How can a God of love allow suffering?

Suffering is a challenge for Christians and non-Christians alike. We need to be really careful not to offer trite responses that shut down honest enquiries just because we find these questions difficult to answer.

Read Luke 13:1-9

1. Where are the points in the passage where people might be suffering?
2. Does the suffering the same have the same cause?
3. What does Jesus say is not the cause of their suffering?
4. What does Jesus say everyone needs to do?
5. Why do you think he says this?

We may be better or worse than other people, the truth as Jesus presents it is that sin does not discriminate in the suffering it causes. We live with the consequences of sin throughout our lives. The only way we can reduce its effect is to repent. When Jesus calls us to repent he is challenging us to make a radical turn from one way of life to another.

Rather than allowing suffering the parable Jesus told about the fig tree suggests that God is allowing more time to turn back to him.

In Deeper

Read Luke 13:10-21

- When Jesus is confronted by suffering what does he do?
- In verses 14-16 who would have allowed the suffering to continue? Why?
- How can our religious views and opinions cause others to suffer?
- What is the one command that Jesus said would identify his disciples?

We live with the consequences of the knowledge of good and evil. Suffering is not something caused by God, but is the effect of sin on creation. The God of love has put in place the means to break the power of sin. The question for us then becomes: How do we navigate a world where suffering happens?

You may think that you are too small, too insignificant. Jesus told two parables to illustrate how that is not true.

- Mustard grows into a bush, not a tree.
 - So if a mustard seed grew into a tree that would be something never seen before.

Which is the whole point! Nothing like the Kingdom of God has been seen on Earth before. That is what will happen if we bring blessing instead of suffering.

- Yeast in a large amount of dough.
 - The Greek says 3 satas, which is $\frac{3}{8}$ of a bushel, about 22 litres or 30 kg, roughly 66 lbs.
 - You only need a small amount of yeast working through 30 kilos of dough and you would sustain a community.

And that is the point! No one is too small, too insignificant, to make a difference in the Kingdom of God and transform your community.