

*Readings:*

- *Isaiah 55:1, 10-13*

- *Luke 13:1-9*

A few weeks ago, a transwoman in a refugee-camp in Germany reported: „When I wanted to go to the Lady's bathroom, the women spit on me. When I wanted to use the Men's bathroom, I got beaten by the men. When I turned to the social worker, he said: Why do you dress like that? Behave as a normal man and you will be treated well.“

What would you say? Who should she choose to be? Should she dress and behave like the men in the camp? Should she meet their expectations? Is it her own fault if she gets beaten?

In Germany, marriage is still not allowed for gays and lesbians. A lot of activists for same-sex-marriage argue: „Hey, we are just normal people. Don't be afraid: We are just like every heterosexual couple.“ The flip-side of this is: Many LGBT-people may not be „normal enough“ for this argumentation - those who walk around in leather, the butch, the fags... Better not have them visible! „Why can't they behave normal? Look at the BDSM-group at the gay pride. No wonder we are not allowed marriage. It's their own fault if they are not given equal rights!“, people often say.

Is it? Is it their own fault? Don't they have a right to choose who they are?

Have you heard about New Years Eve in Cologne this year? Hundreds of men gathered in order to molest women and to harrass them. It was a nightmare. Afterwards, the public started to discuss what to do. And again, it's often the women who are supposed to change their behaviour. Sure, if a woman stays at home, she won't experience violence on the streets...

But is this what we want? Do women not have the right to choose who they are? „Women, stay at home, don't dress up! Look at her! Isn't it her own fault if she dresses that way!“

Again and again the same question: Should we give in and meet the expectations? Should we give up basic values in order to „avoid violence“?

That's the questions many people ask when facing suffering, destruction and violence.

This is where the parable of the fig tree comes in. When the Gospel of Luke was written, people were also facing suffering, destruction and violence. For them, it had been only recently that Jews and the Roman Empire had been fighting each other. The after effects of that war were devastating. Jerusalem and it's temple had been destroyed. The whole region was either burned or destroyed. The trees in that area had been used for the war. If there were trees at all, they were young and needed time to grow.

This is what the people had in mind when they listened to Luke's Jesus. After all that suffering they asked themselves: Why did this happen? What does it mean? Is God still with us? Who's fault is it?

There are two things that Luke's Gospel clarifies here:

**1. Don't blame the victim!**

I read again what Luke writes in the first verses: „ Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this

way? I tell you, no!"

They were NOT worse sinners. The suffering did NOT happen because they „deserved“ it. Don't - blame - the - victim!

The second thing that Luke clarifies is:

**2. You can't go on like you did before. There is no „back to normal“. If you want to go „back to normal“, there will be more suffering, more violence and more destruction.**

Or, in the words of Jesus: „unless you repent, you too will all perish.“ He even repeats that! If you continue as before, there will be violence again. This is just the way it will go.

Please note that Jesus does NOT indicate here that the violence is caused by a punishing God. Jesus does not introduce us to a God sitting above and saying: „Oh, look at that sinners. They deserve some punishment. Let's kill them. It's their own fault.“

Jesus just points out: If you continue as before, there will be more violence and destruction and suffering.

So, what can or should happen instead?

This is why Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree.

The fig tree faces the same questions as the Jews back then and as the transpersons, butches, women, fags and so many others face today: The fig tree is not meeting someone else's expectations.

And as today, there is a voice saying: „If you don't behave according to my expectations, you're gonna be cut down. It's just what you deserve.“

So, the fig tree also experiences the „blaming the victim“.

But in the parable, is it really the fig-tree that causes the problems? Is it „his own fault“?

People back then knew that for a fig tree to bear fruits it needs some time. 3-5 years, more or less. For growing fruits, the tree needs two things, and we here them in the parable:

- 1) Digging. The digging is important. It makes the ground loose, light, not so hard and harsh. (We also might have some more easy-going and relaxation sometimes, don't we?)
- 2) Fertilization: And for the fertilization, you need – manure: Bullshit, in the full sense of the world.

So, if there is a lot of bullshit around you and some easy-going, chances are high, that you are part of fruitful procedure right now :)

If the fig-tree bears fruits or not, does not simply depend on the „goodness“ of the fig-tree, but it depends very much on how it's treated!

That's why it matters so much how the two men act in the parable.

And THEY will show us what it means „to repent“ in the context of this parable.

The first man is the owner of the vineyard. He literally „turns“ – he turns away in order to leave the fig-tree alone. He turns from cutting down the tree that doesn't meet his

expectations. By this, he turns away from the logic of destruction. At least for one more year. Maybe during this year he will change his mind on some things.

The second man is the one who's taking care of the fig-tree. He also shows a turn-around: He re-turns the cutting down of the tree back into the hands of the owner. He refuses an order! „If YOU want to do it, then YOU do it. I am not part of that business!“

- So, what's the conclusion?

It's **the promises of God** we can see in the fig-tree! Do you remember the reading from Isaiah we just heard? All the promises? Many people might say: „Look at the world. Where are the promises? Do you really believe that God's promises will ever bear fruits? Do you really believe in this God? Come on, be realistic, leave your faith behind! Cut it down!“

Yes, there are many times we don't see any fruits from God's promises. But that doesn't mean that we have to cut them down. This would only contribute to the logic of violence and destruction. If you cut them down now, you would only make sure that they REALLY never bear fruits.

No, the parable is about taking care of the promises even in times when they don't bear fruit. DON'T give up now. Don't give in to the violence and the destruction. HOLD ON to your hopes. Hold on to your rights. Hold on to God's promises. Engage yourself so that they can bear fruits.

Don't ask the transwoman in the refugees-camp to behave as a man – let's create circumstances that she can choose to be who she is!

Don't ask the leather dyke to be „a normale female“. Fight for her rights to choose to be who she is!

Don't ask the gay couple to look like the crowd on the streets. Don't join the bullying, but encourage them to choose to be who they are!

I finish with a quote from „Transgender Europe“ who put it that way: „Only if our movement stands in solidarity with everyone, including migrants, people of colour and sex workers, can we begin to overcome the violence and transphobic hatred against our communities.“

God's promises are for all. Let's hold on to them.

*Thank you to Ruth Poser for reading the fig-tree as God's promises in: „Gott ist anders. Gleichnisse neu gelesen“, Gütersloh 2014*