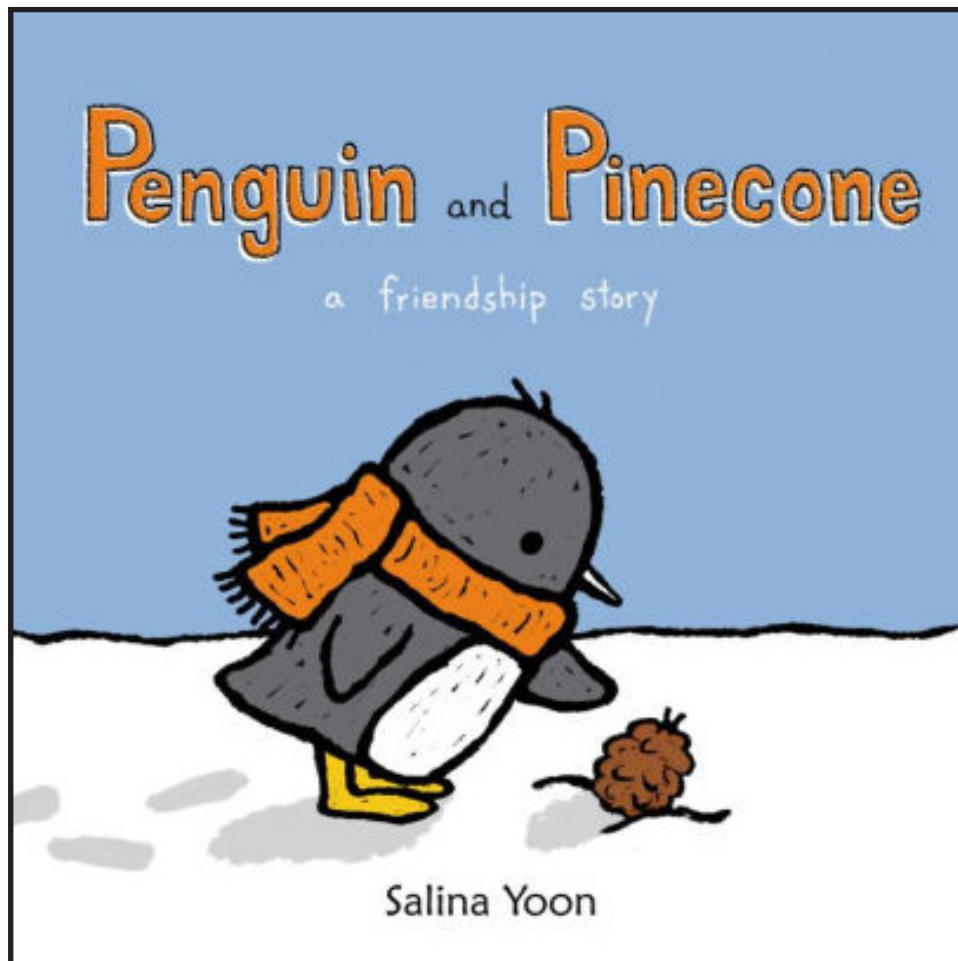


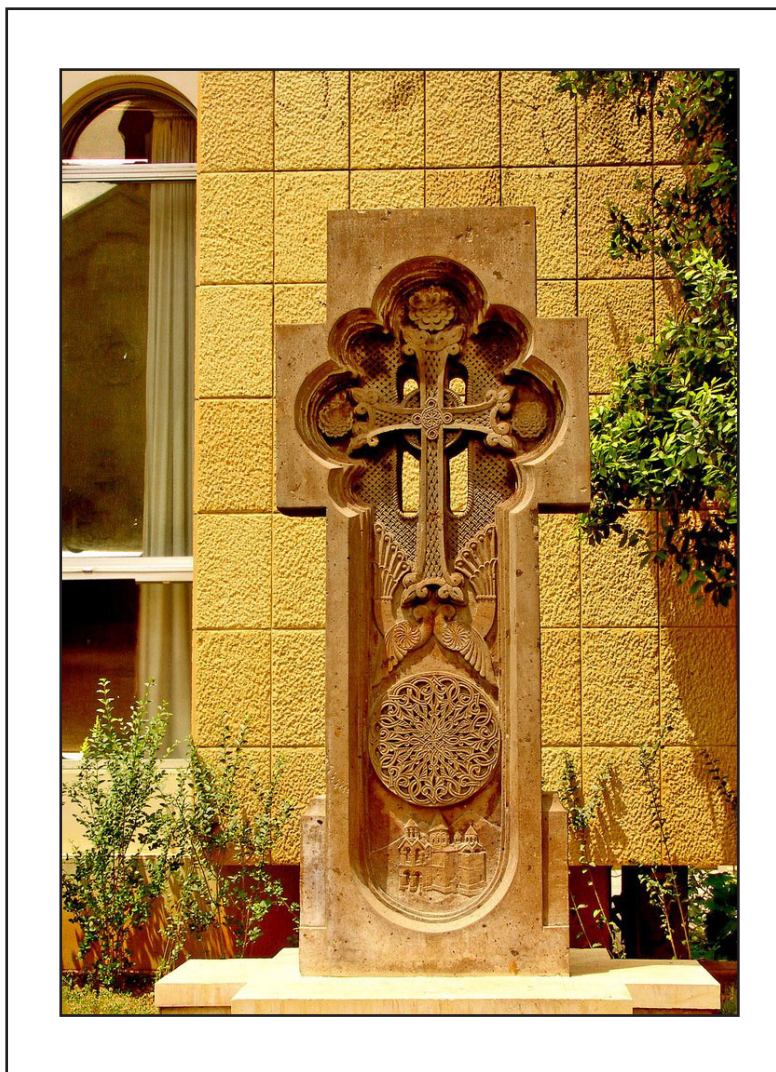
Living Grace

CYCLE C 3RD SUNDAY
OF LENT

“CALLED TO GROW FRUIT & CALLED TO GROW LOVE”



*In **Penguin and Pinecone: A Friendship Story**, curious little Penguin finds a lost pinecone in the snow and their friendship grows into something extraordinary! But, as Penguin's grandfather tells him, a pinecone "can't grow big and strong on the ice," so Penguin makes a difficult journey to bring his friend to the nearest forest; his labors are rewarded when he returns to the forest years later and finds that Pinecone is now a towering tree - still wearing the scarf that Penguin knit for him. "Penguin and Pinecone may have been far apart, but they always stayed in each other's hearts."*



ARMENIAN CROSS

*Stone sculpture at Catholic Church in the Cilicia region of Lebanon
Antelias, Lebanon*

EXPLORING THE ART:

An Armenian cross is a symbol that combines a cross with elements of a ripe tree. In Armenian Christianity it is combined with the Christian cross used for high crosses called khachkars. Khachkars are carved from stone by craftspeople in Armenia, and they act as a focal point for worship symbolizing the union between the secular and divine. Khachkars are carved using local stone and have an ornamentally carved cross in the middle, resting on the symbol of a sun, with vegetation motifs, and carvings of saints and animals. Once finished, the Khachkar is erected during a small religious ceremony. After being blessed and anointed, the Khachkar is believed to possess holy powers and can provide help, protection, victory, long life, remembrance, and mediation towards salvation of the soul. Among more than 50,000 Khachkars in Armenia, each has its own pattern, and no two are alike. Khachkar craftsmanship is transmitted through families or from master to apprentice, teaching the traditional methods and patterns, while encouraging regional distinctiveness.

SYMBOL OF LIFE

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

PENGUIN AND PINECONE: A FRIENDSHIP STORY

Written by & Illustrated by Salina Yoon

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 13:1-9

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

Jesus said to them in reply,

"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!

Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on them—
do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!"

And he told them this parable:

"There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,
he said to the gardener,

'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.

So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil?'

He said to him in reply,

'Sir, leave it for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;
it may bear fruit in the future.
If not you can cut it down.'"

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP GROWS ABUNDANCE THROUGH DEATH TO SELF - OR THE SEED.

The story of Penguin and Pinecone helps understand this difficult Gospel. The Gospel reading begins with people complaining to Jesus about another sect of Judaism's sacrifice not being as worthy as theirs. The people are pointing out that what they do is more worthy, holy, and pleasing to God than what the other group does. Much of this goes on in our day between churches comparing themselves to other churches in the community. "Our way is better than your way" thinking is at play here. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach a lesson of how far they are from understanding what it means to be a participant in the kingdom of God. Jesus responds to this attitude questioning if they think bad things happen only to the people who do unworthy sacrifices? Or do they think they will be protected from wrong doing if they do the perfect sacrifice? Jesus makes the point in so many words that "rain falls on the just and the unjust". Or in our day, hurricanes come to the just and the unjust. There are things that God cannot sort out or protect us from. There is evil in the world. There are natural disasters. They just happen, as part of the dynamic of free will.

Jesus tells us that the important thing is to repent. Repentance puts one in the state of receptivity to grace and friendship with God, a partnership. To help us understand the power of repentance, Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree. For a tree to bear fruit, it must be connected to the process of transformation and receive nourishment through its roots. The seed must be willing to change. The change agents - water, sun, and soil - all contribute to the growth of the tree into its divine potential, that of bearing nourishing life-giving fruit. If a branch gets cut off, it becomes dry, brittle, and unable to bear fruit. It dies. In this parable Jesus tells us that to "repent" means to change our direction and priorities, and do what we need to do to be connected to the group process. This change and connection is where our nourishment lies. In this shared process, and by being open to the growth dynamic, we will be able to bring forth fruit. In a great line in today's gospel, Jesus says, "Why should it exhaust the soil?" Think about it, when a person in a family, a group, or a team refuses to cooperate, communicate, or collaborate, they can exhaust everyone else in the group. Jesus is telling us in this parable to repent. Do what is needed to get connected. Otherwise, we bring the whole family or community down. We bring dis-ease and distress to the whole. The important thing for our lives, our families, and our faith communities is not about doing all the right things, having everything in perfect order, and maintaining the status quo. But the important things are to be growing in faith, passing on the love of God, and engaging in the life-giving process of exchange. That is what grows the kingdom of God, and this is what bears fruit.

Our children's story shows a wonderful example of two very different characters sharing love and friendship and the expansive outcome that it brings into the world. What is wonderful about a faith community is that it's filled of people of all different shapes and sizes. The story of Penguin and Pinecone helps to inspire our families can be the same way. We are called to understanding and growth, being open to explore each other's differences and to learn from them. From this story we learn that it is important to listen and learn from each other. Listening, not judging, is a great way to become connected. Sharing our resources with each other, as Penguin does in knitting a scarf for pinecone, shows us the way. We are called to help each other discern where we belong and to help each other on the journey, even if it means at times to carry one another. Sacrificing for each other, through love and friendship, listening and caring, we help each other find our way home. We cannot do it by ourselves. When we find our home, we can open and grow. As the pinecone in the forest, as the fig tree in the soil. To thrive and become fully what God has created us to be, this is what the path of repentance opens us up to. This is fruitfulness, this is what it means to share in the glory and grace of God bearing fruit that will last.

St. Anselm said, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive". Fruitfulness proclaims the glory of God in a pinecone, a fig tree and a human. That is the inevitable fruit of God's love, it grows!!! All it takes is the humble act of the seed yielding to the soil, and for humans, repentance opens the door to grace and growth. So simple, so risky, yet such great and lasting rewards. This is the offer of the abundant life God desires for each of us. All we must do is yield, be open and receive, like the seed to the soil. So simple yet trust and faith can be so hard. It will crack us wide open, but we have so much to lose without it.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What are some things we can learn from people who are different than ourselves?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What is unique about Pinecone and Penguin's friendship? How do they both relate to each other? How do they learn from each other? What is the benefit? What does Penguin do for Pinecone to help him grow? Is it easy or hard for Penguin?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Jesus comes upon a group of people who are trying to tattle-tale on another group. When we do that are we for or against the other people? Do we think we are better than the others or worse? Whose behavior is worse? How is this different than Pinecone and Penguin's relationship? Jesus points out how this is wrong and how both sides are misinformed as to what really matters. What word does Jesus use in calling forth change? How does repentance bring about change? Can we bear lives of love if we are in a hard-hearted state? How does that compare with the fig tree?

What does the fig tree have to do to start to bear fruit? What does Jesus tell us that humans have to do to start bearing fruit? If someone stays in a hardened state, how does that effect the whole group, family, and church?

Biblical Background

LUKE 13:1-9

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This teaching moment occurred in the public ministry of Jesus leading up to the events of Holy Week. Jesus surely was in the Temple courts when he taught this material, since in his teaching the issue of sacrifice has been brought up, and all sacrifice took place in the Temple arena. The Temple Mount area was approximately 300 yards long (three football fields) and approximately 100 yards wide. Jesus would teach on the Temple Mount and draw thousands to himself. People from Galilee, especially from Nazareth, were considered political and social revolutionaries.

TERMS: **Pilate** Governor of Judea set in this position by Roman authority. He resides in the Antonia Fortress, which was built in the time of Herod the Great, to give the Roman Military overlords a high vantage point over all of the activities that occur on the Temple Mount area.

Pool of Siloam A major spring and source of water for the ancient city of Jerusalem. Archaeological discoveries in recent years have revealed that this was a huge pool complex complete with a covered patio that shaded the water. The roof was supported by massive pillars. Some sort of seismic activity must have toppled one or more of the pillars, and people were killed as a result.

"blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices" This phrase is not to be taken literally. It probably is an allusion to some Galileans who came to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice and in some way angered the General/Governor who took out his anger in an act of vengeance against these supplicants (persons who pray to God or respectfully asks an important person to help them or to give them something that they want very much). They would have been cut down on their way to offer the sacrifice. This is why the story is related to Jesus, that Pilate mixed their blood with the blood of the animal sacrifice that would have been bled from the sacrificial offering.

Repent A theological term that has a common meaning. The root of the word means to "turn around" and come back to the place where you once were standing. It is a way of saying to a person, "don't go down that road! Turn around and come back to me".

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The Fig Tree was an important tree in the theology of the Jewish nation. It was a fig tree that the fruit in the Garden of Eden was taken from. Adam and Eve, when they knew they were naked, sewed together fig leaves to cover themselves modestly. The fig tree produces fruit twice a year in Judea and four times a year in the perfect micro climate of Galilee. Jesus curses a fig tree on the heights of the Mount of Olives because he went to it looking for fruit but found none. The traditional teaching of Judaism (the Talmud) teaches that you plant a fruit tree and tend it for three years before you pick and consume any of its fruit. If it does not produce fruit in the third season you cut it down and plant another. Jesus sees the Temple as a "fruitless fig tree", and the surprise in the parable is that Jesus is willing to work with the tree another year, after it is first fertilized.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: This was a test on the part of the messenger to try and goad Jesus into a response that might harm his reputation as a teacher of peace. Jesus is also from Galilee, and people thought that his geographic loyalty to this northern region of the land would be revealed in a curse on Pilate and the Romans who occupy the land. The "cause and effect" theory of religion is challenged in this teaching of Jesus. Sometimes things happen for no other reason than that they happen. John 9 opens with the disciples asking who sinned, the man or his parents, that he was born blind. Jesus responds that neither sinned, he was simply born blind. The true purpose of religion and sacrificial practices is to cultivate fruitfulness. This is the intent of God's ways, not adherence to the rules, and comparisons as to who is better at adhering to the rules. Jesus points to the barren fig tree to illustrate that fruit comes from the growth of receptivity to God's ways.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: What does spiritual growth look like? As a family, be on the lookout for people or groups where you see growth and fruitfulness. What common characteristics can you identify?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: CARRYING OTHERS
ABUNDANCE

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Plant some seeds. Talk about all the cooperation that is needed for them to grow from God's creation and from yourselves. Make the connection of the growth that comes when we work together with God.