

South Madison is likely to lose its supermarket in 2019, possibly for years to come. It's time to organize and raise our voices together to make sure this does not happen.

- Dean/SSM hopes to:
  - Purchase the Pick 'n Save lot and tear down the supermarket on South Park Street this year.
  - Construct its new clinic on the former supermarket site.
- Meanwhile the City is talking about plans to:
- Reopen its Request for Proposals to develop the Truman Olson site (next door to Pick 'n Save).
  - Thereby delay development of Truman Olson and possible construction of a new supermarket on that site.

What you can do keep healthy food access on Park Street:

- Write to [friendsofparkstreet@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofparkstreet@gmail.com) to say you want to receive updates from us.
- Attend a meeting hosted by the City & Dean/SSM to support South Madison's only supermarket. March 28th : 5:30PM at TBD, the Dean/SSM Redevelopment Committee will discuss its plans for the Pick 'n Save site.

Join Friends of Park Street to Save South Madison's Supermarket & Support Local Access to Healthy Food!  
Email: [friendsofparkstreet@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofparkstreet@gmail.com).

*Be a Chicken* (17Mar19)  
Luke 13:1-9, 31-35

It's Lent. You asked for repentance.

Well, here you go: repent or die. That's how Jesus seems to start today.

Those of you in House Church groups may notice I skipped these verses for your discussion, worrying it was more than you were looking to bite off for your first gatherings.

Yet I'd say it's good news, even if it sounds like bad news, backed up by worse news.

The bad news is that there are irrational accidents. If Jesus has insight into some divine explanation, he's not sharing it. People are killed unjustly, die by accident. If we go on the hunt for meaning in the ins and outs of life, the good and bad that strikes us, it can be inexplicable.

Sometimes we do know. Sometimes breaking the law results in suffering punishments.

Sometimes we don't exercise and end up with health effects. It's not that there's absolutely no cause and effect in our universe.

But neither can it explain everything. You might exercise lots and still wind up sick. You might not have done anything wrong that led to you getting into an accident. You might even be trying to show your devotion to God, like those people in the example offering their sacrifices, who still got murdered.

In that way, 39 years ago next week, Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated while saying the Words of Institution at the communion table. There's no explaining that he was a bad person. Maybe the opposite, this past year Pope Francis officially named him a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. So we can't write off his death by what he did wrong, unless we say that it was intentionally provoking military death squads by standing up for the poor.

But we might also be Lutheran enough to realize that's not quite our view of saints. Oscar wasn't really better than us. It's not about miracle workers or extreme holiness. It's not that God works more through some special people. In clear evidence, St. Oscar wasn't so much better that he should've been spared suffering an untimely death.

That's the worse news, maybe: you're not better. That's behind the question asked of Jesus. They may have wanted to alleviate their self-concern by disparaging the unfortunate, to say that they got slaughtered or smushed because they deserved it, that death may have been calamitous but it wasn't unworthy or uncalled for.

But Jesus says they were no worse sinners than those who asked the question. You might have hoped if you tried a little harder you could get on God's good side and avoid the sudden surprises of disaster. But that's not how this works, Jesus says. That may be the worse news: that you can't prevent the bad news, can't stop all accidents by improving your moral character.

It's pertinent because it keeps happening, with almost exact parallels in headline tragedies this past week. Airplanes crash. Worshippers in a

mosque are gunned down. It's senseless and fear-inducing. And you can't escape by thinking you're better.

Then Jesus says, "Unless you repent, you will perish as they did." He even reiterates it, repeats it. He says we're not worse sinners and can't do anything to spare ourselves the loss, but nevertheless we would die the same way unless we repent. So is he just rubbing it in? Your sin isn't worse and there's nothing you can do to avoid death. So repentance doesn't spare you. So what does Jesus mean?

In my relentless wrestling to find good news, here's what I want to do with that: the word "repent" is the Greek work "metanoia." Sara got us started in noticing it's about turning around. So it's not really about regretting your sin or feeling bad you're bad. But it *is* about how you live now. Metanoia literally means to rethink, to change your mind. Part of it is in our verse we're holding from Romans for this season: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (12:2). Our mind is changed from what it was, transformed in and to Jesus.

See, our mind is usually made up on how the world works. We think that it's about trying to be good and being rewarded for it, or being punished when we're bad. We look at effects and go on the hunt for a cause. Not only that, but our minds are made up that long life is our goal, that health is a default state not a rare privilege, that accumulation of resources and the pursuit of ease is the right way to live. Conformed to this world, we've got our minds pretty well set that things should work that way.

But with minds changed in Jesus, we look at and live in the world differently. We don't need to think how we can get ahead or compete or beat others. We don't have to equate something bad inevitably as a punishment. We don't regard life as an entitlement instead of each moment as a gift. We don't even think that this life is all there is *of* life.

Finding ourselves in that holy mindset fits Jesus' gardening example: a fig tree is not bearing

fruit. In our cost-benefit analysis, the tree is taking up space and wasting resources, failing to produce anything good, so we want to cut it down. Our landowner methods exactly match what we just had to discard as not God's perspective. We just heard that God doesn't cut us down, doesn't wipe us out, doesn't annihilate us or murder us or pull the plug because of our misbehavior.

Instead, this patience of God demands, "Give it time. I'll keep working on it." We may not like that, not prefer it. It wouldn't be our mindset. And just as we can't answer why God doesn't punish the evildoers or selectively cause calamity to smite some, we can't answer why God wouldn't intervene more directly for the good. Why would God be patient? Why would God dawdle with spreading manure? Why put up with something that isn't doing what you want? Yet here we glimpse God's methods of cultivation, of adding some fertilizer, of gradual soil improvement, of wait and see and hope. Again, metanoia, repentance willing to set aside your own convinced perspective, instead enables you to think the way God does, with mind transformed in Jesus.

Caveat: I realize I'm pursuing one path here. There may be times Jesus would, indeed, declare that if something doesn't change, it's all over. It comes to mind immediately for abusive relationships. But I'd say we're apt in lots of instances to come up with quick solutions that are drastic and antagonistic and aren't about escaping hurt but trying to find retribution and fight fire with fire.

That worry is framed in the end of the reading. King Herod threatens Jesus, the rotten ruler is out to kill him. Our minds would say to strike back at the empire. But Jesus is chicken. God the Mother, as a hen thinks first about love. She is about putting herself in harm's way, a sacrifice that averts the destruction on you, nonviolent retaliation. It's power that saves life without trying to take it at the expense of other life.

To be clear, Jesus could've said he would attack the fox like a lion, the king of the jungle. We look for Jesus to kick some bad guy butt.

Jesus the lumberjack with the clear-cutting spiritual chainsaw. Back to that God who tips towers and flicks airplanes to get at the sinners.

You know, I get really sick of how often we refer to God as “Almighty,” because we inevitably figure God’s a fierce warrior. But God is the Almighty Chicken, desiring to hold us under her protective wing, never giving up on that way of life.

“How often I’ve wished to gather you,” Jesus exclaims, “but you were not willing!” Not willing, since we’ve got our minds made up not on being vulnerable chicks but on being foxy, gnashing our teeth, wanting to bite back. We know what’s right and want to fight evil. We’re ready for the immediate answer. We want Oscar Romero to use his power as archbishop to arm the masses and lead the righteous warfare. We don’t want him to say prayers, to use his voice not for rallying but for old words in worship.

But then it might be time for some metanoia. The God of patience is working today and tomorrow, spreading manure to fertilize your work and your life, continuing to be a chicken, with compassion and seeking care and not vying violently, even overlooking wrong in service of the greater good and life. In the face of sin and fruitless trees and tragic accidents, even when it seems there’s no way to change anything, when it seems mostly hopeless, right up to death, when the fox kills the chicken and the lamb of God is slain, still Jesus is working today and tomorrow.

And on the third day? Well, on the third day he rose again. He’s going to complete his work. He’s going to Jerusalem, but Easter’s coming. It’s amazing, but if you can wrap your mind around that, that’s all the good news you need to know.