Genesis 18:20-33

10th Sunday after Pentecost

July 23, 1989

One bad apple spoils the whole barrel. One apple begins rotting, soon all the apples that are in contact with it are useless. With apples, with people it is the same.

One child in the classroom begins acting up, soon the whole classroom is chaos. One car begins exceeding the speedlimit, soon everyone has joined the merry chase. Today one is using cocain in the neighborhood, tommorrow cocain use is an epidemic.

Rotting apples and evil need no encouragement to spread themselves. Left alone, the apple barrel and the world become a stinking stench.

We see this in children. We speak of them as spoiled. When there is no "no". When the little sins are ignored. When the parents do not reach into that barrel and pull out the rotten apples, then the child may lose all freshness, and wholesomeness. Spoiled.

When the world of humans was young, a child, the Lord saw how the rot had spread. The whole barrel was unfit but an apple or two, Noah and his family. So quickly plucked them out of the barrel and into the ark. And washed all the rest down the drain. What else could be done with rotten apples?

Today we hear the beginning of that same story all over again. The cities of Sodom and Gommorrah. The Lord had heard the cried of those who had been abused in these cities, he came to investigate first hand, to once more utterly destroy the evil. But before he did, he wanted to talk to his chosen one, Abraham.

The Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know.

Then Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou inix then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are
Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Abraham did not regard the Lord as one who was fixed and finished and all decided. He spoke to the Lord because he believed the Lord would listen, consider, even change his mind. Just as we pray believing that words we speak may cause the Lord to turn to a new course of action, believing that he listens, believing that our small words enter into the very heart of God. So Abraham spoke to God, spoke to him about his barrel, rotten apples, good apples. At what point is the barrel lost? Is it worth saving for fifty apples?

And the Lord said yes.

For forty - yes, for thirty - yes, for twenty - yes for ten - are ten good apples in a barrel full of rotten ones? Are they significant enough to save the whole barrel, the whole city? And the Lord answered, "Yes."

Not only evil would have weight in the Lord's judgements, but also good. He would see not only the wicked, but also the righteous, not only sin, but also good deeds.

Yet Abrahams whole discussion with the Lord proved academic. Ten were not found, only Lot, his wife, his daughters and sons in law.

So the Lord plucked the good apples out of the barrel, though the sons- in-law stayed behind, refusing to go, the Lord rushed Lot and his wife and daughters away from Sodom, and then utterly destroyed the whole valley.

But even the good apples had been tainted with the rot, Lot's wife looked back though she had strict orders not to do so. When she looked back, longing for life in the barrel, she was turned into a pillar of salt. And the daughters With no men left around, save their father, they saw no hope for them of offspring. So they got their father drunk, and became pregnant by him. For all of the Lord's efforts, the whole barrel had been lost.

The so called experts tell we parents in these days, watch your children's friends. It is not the home in which a child is raised they say, that will
determine whether he gets into trouble, but the friends he keeps. Not the
city, not the school, not the church, not the parents, but the friends, the
others apples in the barrel that will determine health or rot.

But the Lord did not listen to the experts.

He could have sent his son to the group up by the dead sea. Qumran, the
community that has left us the dead sea scrolls. The Lord who had seen enough
barrels thrown out through flood and fire and war to last him an eternity
could have sent his son could have sent his son to Qumran, those holy men
gathered around God’s law ever vigilant to cut out every little piece of rot.
Only for the righteous was that community, but the Lord sent his son to
dwell in the valley below. Among all the sinners and tax collectors, rotten
apples of every variety. Yes the Lord could have said I will send my son to be
with the good to preserve them, but not he took the most precious apple and
placed it in the barrel of stench.

The Lord was doing something new.
bad
One apple spoils the whole barrel. The whole old testament is
testimony to that. And all of life as we see it around us. The barrel is the
world, do what we may evil spreads, finally every apple rots. But the Lord
said, I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do not you not perceive
it.

What happens when one good apple, one truly good apple is tossed into the
spoiled barrel. Can the good infect the evil? Can rotten apples by touching
the good apple be granted health and freshness and wholesomeness?

God sent his son. Those whom he touched were made new in body and in
spirit. The blind saw, the deaf heard, sinners were forgiven, declared
righteous. Apples restored, rot overdone.

Seeing what was happening, how its steady march was being threatened,
the rot gathered around Jesus, smothered him with its stench, choked the
very life from him.
Dead. But not spoiled. Covered with the stinking mess of evil all
around but not himself tainted.

Then the Lord raised him up. The good apple, the Lord Son of God.

Now we are joined to him. Touched by him. Granted his freshness, his
health through our contact with him.

What happens when one good apple, one truly good apple is tossed into
the barrel? That question is being answered. We are seeing:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has
passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ
reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is
in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses
against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Christ makes us new.

And we are sent out into the barrel to do the same, having
the ministry of reconciliation in Christ's name, that the whole world might
be restored. Then the whole world and all creation will witness and proclaim
God's true proverb: One good apple has made new the whole barrel. Amen.