

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
Year C March 3, 2013

Theme: The God of Second Chances, but...

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Former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford began his attempt at a return to political life and a run for congress recently by ring invoking the “God of second chances.”

You may recall that while he was Governor Mr. Sanford was absent from his state for four days, location unknown, until his office issued a statement saying he was hiking the Appalachian Trail where the cell phones don't work.

Soon, however, the press discovered he had been adulterously cavorting in Argentina with his mistress.

Now it remains to be seen whether or not the citizens of South Carolina are “voters of second chances,” but the former Governor is clearly correct in saying that the God of the bible and the God of Jesus is “a God of second chances.”

Be it the reluctant Prophet Jonah or lustful and murderous King David,

Be it best friend and leader of the Apostles, Peter, or persecuting Paul, all of these needed at least a second, some a third and fourth chance, before they served as God needed them.

Even the story related in our first Scripture this weekend, tells of one given several second chances.

Moses, as a baby had been given a second chance when his mother set him adrift in a basket among the reeds of the Nile River only to be found by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in the royal household.

Then when he killed an Egyptian for beating a fellow Hebrew and fled for his own life, Moses found a home in the desert, took a wife, had children and settled down for what he thought would be his new life.

But instead God took this stutterer with low self-esteem, appeared to him in a burning bush and told him to go down to Pharaoh and demand freedom for his people.

Talk about second chances.

Meanwhile Jesus told a parable of a fig tree given a second chance:

A little loosening of the soil,
Some extra water,
A load of manure,
And another year.

Any of you with first generation Mediterranean relatives or friends may have experience with how highly regarded figs trees and their luscious fruits are to people of that region.

Yet, second chances to a point: a tree that does not produce the sweet, juicy prized figs after the years of babying and fussing and TLC will be cut down.

And perhaps Jesus' point: second chances, repentance, yes, but eventually time runs out.

For those people on whom the tower of Siloam fell or those Galileans Pilate killed, time ran out: no more second chances, no time left for repentance.

What about those poor tourists taking a hot air balloon ride over the ancient ruins of Luxor, Egypt, this week or even those people in New York, Washington and Boston who just thought they were going to work or taking a plane trip on 9/11: there were no more second chances.

While we are alive, while we are physically and mentally fit, second chances are usually a possibility.

But we never know when that opportunity will have passed us by.

Thus, the Jewish Rabbi Eliezar once wryly said: **“The time to repent is the day before you die!”**

Not long ago I was talking with a forty-something husband and father who had told me his marriage was quite a bit less than satisfying.

I asked if he and his wife had something in the past; “Oh, yeah,” he said with a wistful smile.

“Why don’t you start dating each other again and see if you can’t find it again?”

“Gosh, I can’t tell you the last time we went out on a date.”

“I’m going start eating better, exercising, losing weight – right before I have my heart attack.”

“My sister and I have not spoken since Dad died: she can die and go to blazes before I’ll pick up the phone first” – well, she just may.... Or perhaps you just may.

I’ve always wanted to _____(fill in the blank)_____ before I die, before I get too old to do it, to enjoy it.

A good friend of mine always wanted “to jump out of a perfectly good airplane,” as he termed it.

Jack finally parachuted at aged 72; he was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer within a year.

Repentance, brothers and sisters, is the joyous acceptance of a second chance.

---a chance to try again,

---a chance to get it right the second time around,

---a chance to seize hold of a possibility before it is too late and that possibility is gone forever.

In this Eucharist we give thanks and praise to the God of Second Chances.

We give thanks and praise for sending his Son to tell us of the mercy and compassion and forgiveness that is always ours.

But even the God of Second Chances cannot help us if we never reach for that chance.

As that old rabbi said: **“The day to repent is the day before you die.”**