

**TFTD 2025.16**

**Saturday March 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Signs of the times and second chances: Luke 12:54 – 13:9**



Tomorrow marks the fifth anniversary of the UK government's first lockdown announcement, ordering people to 'Stay at home.' The memorable slogans of that time were designed to be simple and easy to follow—or so we thought! In those unprecedented circumstances, the goal was to build a sense of collective responsibility. Why wouldn't we do all we could to protect ourselves and others from the risk of infection and its possible tragic consequences?

In today's reading, Jesus highlights the failure to act for the greater good by crying out, 'Hypocrisy!' If the 'signs of the time' are clear, why don't we act on them? Moving into chapter 13, the conversation shifts to a timeless question: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' Examples are given—one involving Pilate's brutal murder of people during a sacrifice, and another where eighteen people died when a tower collapsed as part of his aqueduct project. People may have expected Jesus to say these tragedies were God's punishment for sin. But instead, Jesus offers a resounding 'No' and tells the parable of a fig tree that isn't bearing fruit, showing God's desire to give us a second chance.

Jesus' three years of ministry were nearly over, and there's urgency in his short, memorable parable—just four verses long. The vineyard owner,

frustrated by the barren tree, wants to cut it down to make better use of the soil. But the gardener pleads for one more year—a chance to cultivate and replenish the tree, giving it room to grow and bear fruit.

Reflecting on the early days of lockdown, we recall the anxiety, sorrow, and adversity that impacted so many lives. These memories are now woven into our national and personal stories. Yet, those days also revealed remarkable positives. NHS Volunteer Responders delivered medicines, while ‘Virtual Volunteers’ stayed connected with isolated individuals. Neighbours shopped for those shielding, new friendships formed—though two meters apart. Air quality improved, and pollution decreased as travel ceased. Many of us had more time to pray, reflect, and read, often joining others online. We exercised more, gave more generously, and expressed deep gratitude to frontline workers, teachers, and school staff who adapted quickly to new ways of teaching and learning.

Do you remember that hope? The hope that, once out of lockdown, life would be different. We dreamed of traveling less, appreciating each other more, complaining less, and contributing more to society. We saw this as an opportunity to reset and live more fruitful lives—our own second chance.

Could there be parallels between this and the second chance the gardener secures for the vine? An opportunity to be nurtured, nourished, and to grow more abundantly into the Kingdom of God. Perhaps this Lent is the perfect time to reflect on the opportunities we have to cultivate ‘signs of the time’—signs that point the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

God bless,  
Rhona Dalziel

