

# Give me time – give me space

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Luke 13:1-9

Rev J Shannon

I must have been about 8 years old when my dad told a joke at the dinner table.

There was a prairie farmer who courted a mail-order bride. Back in the days when the Post Office was as close to Tinder (or Tender) as you could get. After many months and letters, the day finally arrived when he would pick his bride up at the rail siding. He hitched the old nag to the wagon.

The new 'Mrs' got off the train. He was about the only one there but he smiled and picked up her bag and didn't say much. He helped her into the wagon and off they went across the prairie. Along the rutted road, the old horse stumbled and the farmer shouted out to the horse, "That's one!". Time passed and about an hour or so later, the horse stumbled again. "That's two!", the farmer called. When the horse stumbled again, within sight of the little house, the farmer picked up his gun and shot it.

"Heavens above!", the woman cried. "You can't do that, that poor old thing..." and just as the bride launched into a passionate tirade, the farmers said quietly, "that's one."

Putting aside the fact that I was too young and we, as a world, were too naive to recognise what now adays would be seen as domestic violence, ...it was a funny story and it had a profound effect on me.

Many years later, I was taming a toddler. We lived on a large acreage and he knew he could throw tantrums ... as long as he did it *anywhere* outside. He stomped his little feet and carried-on and I would open the door and demand he go outside. Of course, with no one to watch, there was no point and it would soon pass. But for those of you who grew up in the country, you know home behaviour and town behaviour are not the same. He knew that in town, he *behaved*...no matter what. How did I tame a wilful toddler? He'd start to act up and I would quietly say to him, "that's one."

He never knew what came after 3 but he knew it was fearsome and you didn't want to go there.

Jesus used parables and told stories to teach people in their own language, within their own experiences. He had the scriptures as back-up but unlike me,

he couldn't dash to the bookcase for some learned texts...and it probably wouldn't have worked any better than it does when I go all academic on you. He told stories – and that was the language of the people.

Here is a story of an unproductive tree. The farmer wants to cut it down but Jesus recommends a little nurturing and a little time, and it will bear fruit. And if it doesn't, it doesn't – you gave it what it needs.

Children are a little like that. My father's mythology was that he was basically successful and purposeful from the moment he left home but in reality, I know that's not true. He was a wastrel, jazz musician until my mother burdened him with responsibilities and then he was an ambitious businessman who failed many times before he succeeded. He'd get up, dust himself off and try something new until he found his niche. So, when he was impatient for *my* son to get on with it and make a success of himself, I was a little annoyed. I knew there is a time for young men to faff around until they find their passion and then there is no stopping them. There is great harm we can do to a young person by forcing them into productivity too young. Often it breaks out in mid-life crises. Where they have a driving need to reclaim the juvenile selves they were not allowed to be. Time and space – a little nurturing and if it works – it works. Death lies before us like an axe anyway.

yes, thank God, my son did find his feet and got going ...also with the help of a good woman.

Had the farmer chopped down the tree – he would have had to wait longer than a year to grow a new one. Grace and space – are hard gifts to give.

Earlier this week, I came across a baby sea turtle on Tura Beach. It was resolutely marching towards the waves on its little feet. It was so small. It took achingly long to reach the waters edge... And as it waded in, just as it got its face in the water, a wave would throw it up 8 metres up onto the sand. The little thing would turn and start resolutely marching towards the water again. After another achingly long, determined trudge, it would get to the water and be thrown back onto the sand a few metres down the beach. The desire to pick it up and wade into the surf was almost overwhelming.

But I know, if you handle it, you mess with their directional system – they can forget where they were going and your hands are covered with germs that can kill them ...

And, finding their own way – or not, is an important part of their stamina and genetic makeup. If they are weak, they should not breed.

Now that I think of it, my dad was a lot like the turtle.

Our Lenten journey so far has been about being still, listening, drowning out the many voices so we can hear the One. Now we add patience – the gift of time and space.

Standing back and sometimes watching your children (or your partner) (or even yourself) fail is the hardest thing but sometimes, the gift of space and grace is just what they need. Jesus is saying, *that* should be the first choice – not the axe.