

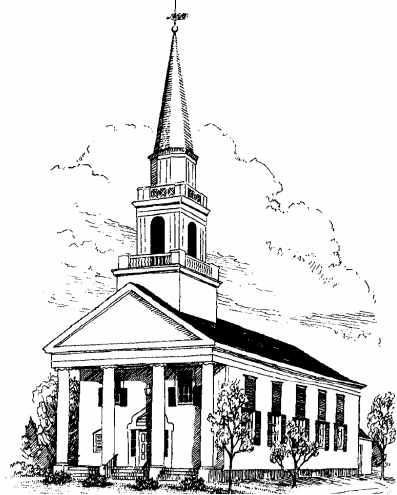
# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from March 7, 2010

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg  
“Let’s Try This”

Scriptures:  
Isaiah 55:1-9  
Luke 13:1-9



The best thing—and maybe the worst thing—about snow days is daytime TV. A week ago Friday, my teacher daughter living in Queens, NY awoke to the news that New York City schools were closed due to the snowstorm—only the second time it had happened in eight years. This was especially joyous for me because I was visiting her at the time and, rather than spending part of the day left to my own resources while I waited for her to get off work, we both found ourselves happily snowbound in our pajamas in her apartment, with nothing planned for the morning but delight in our companionship and some mindless TV.

That’s when I was inaugurated into TLC network’s daytime television series “Say Yes to the Dress.” Now, I have not been interested in bridal gowns in a really long time, but my daughter and most of her friends are in various stages of preparation for wedded bliss, and bridal gowns are very important to them. This television show “Say Yes to the Dress” is a popular way to define and refine one’s own idea of the perfect gown, but more so I think it’s for the viewing audience to be able to freely comment in the privacy of their living rooms on the choices of gowns by others. [“That neckline is all wrong.” “I like the way the train falls in the back, but there’s way too much beading.” “She really shouldn’t wear strapless.” And so on...]

Now if you men will bear with me a little while, allow me to describe the premise of the show, because there’s more to it than just picking the white one! Throughout the hour, we meet a few brides shopping for their dresses in Kleinfeld’s, a large bridal salon in New York City, with a variety of female companions, usually mothers, sisters if applicable, girlfriends, etc. The bride has a vision of what she wants, her companions are along to provide opinions, and the sales clerk is there to facilitate by bringing out gowns which fit the bride’s description and stay within her budget. The TV viewer watches the process until the end when the bride leaves the store having said “yes” to her dream dress.

Sounds simple enough, doesn’t it? You have no idea! The family dynamics, the emotions inherent in the bride, the mismatch of vision and reality, all erupt inside and outside the dressing room as she comes out to model, they frown in disapproval, and she cries to the sales clerk about a myriad of issues, to the point where for a predictable period of time, somehow it’s all her fault for being born in a less-than-perfect body, for coming in with an unrealistic fantasy,

for not being able to afford her favorite one, or for not complying with her mother's wishes, who in most cases, is paying for the dress! Midway through the show the bride is miserable.

And the tendency of the viewing audience is to look on much like smug flies on the wall and to congratulate themselves on their better taste, or their common sense, their healthier relationships, or their sophisticated shopping skills and figure that this young woman or her family or both must have personality flaws or unrealistic expectations or dysfunctional backgrounds or have done something wrong which have landed them in this dismal dress debacle. Break to commercial and we are really glad we're not like them.

Jesus said, don't think that because those Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans. And don't think that those folks who were killed by that falling tower were worse offenders than all the others. No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you'll end up the same way.

Episcopal bishop Michael Curry puts it this way: "Frankly, if God was in the business of meting out judgment and curses in relation to our sins, there probably would not be anyone left on the planet. In this text, Jesus says no to simplistic answers to deep and complex questions..." And he does let those listening know, including us this morning, that although we might escape slaughter by our enemies or falling towers or earthquakes or hurricanes or tsunamis, we still stand in need of repentance, of turning away from sin, and starting anew.

We return to "Say Yes to the Dress" after the commercial break to discover the sales clerk's role in offering fresh ideas and potential solutions to alleviate the bride's dismay. Many of us forget in this day and age of ready-made clothing, where we struggle with the limitations of off-the-rack garments, that professional tailors and seamstresses do exist who are quite adept at adjustments and alterations and flattering additions.

We meet the bride again appearing in the dress earlier discarded because of its lack of cap sleeves, but perfect otherwise. She walks out of the dressing room towards her family and friends who recognize the dress as having been rejected earlier and they erupt in moans: "I thought you didn't like that one. It doesn't have the sleeves you wanted." But right behind the bride enters a stocky woman, pin cushion and small pieces of white, lacey fabric in hand. "Let's try this," she says and deftly pins the fabric onto the dress over the shoulders of the bride, completely transforming the look of the dress as well as the looks on all the faces in the room.

Oh's and Ah's prevail and the show closes with the bride at the cash register with a promise of the perfectly-altered gown within six weeks. And the TV viewing audience realizes they may have been a little quick to judge and they eagerly await the next episode.

Jesus tells his listeners they need to repent and then he offers a parable. A man's fig tree is not bearing fruit after three years of standing in the soil and the man instructs his gardener to cut it down. It's wasting soil. It's a reject. It belongs in the discard pile. And the gardener says, no, before we cut it down, let's try this. Allow me to make some adjustments, to add some things we haven't tried before. And let's give it some more time.

The patience and creativity of the seamstress transformed a bridal dress and a bride. The patience and care of the gardener can transform a barren fig tree into one which bears fruit. And, my friends, the patience and care and creativity and mercy and love of our almighty God can transform us. We, who are no better in God's eyes than poor Haitians, or undocumented immigrants, or tax collectors, or prostitutes, or hijacked passengers, or domestic violence victims; we can be transformed. We, who are in need of repentance as much as any other sinner; we can be transformed. We, who even with the good soil of education and the frequent watering of decent incomes, do not and cannot bear fruit without the grace of God. The *gift* of the grace of God, without which we have no business claiming salvation and by which we are transformed.

Without our recognition of our vulnerability and our need, without our turning away from sin and toward God, without our acceptance of the care and feeding of our Great Gardener, we are wasting God-given space.

But here's the good news. When we are troubled, when we are in pain, when we can find no answers, when dozens of voices fill our ears with their opinions, drowning out our own, just like the thousands of brides who shop at Kleinfeld's every year, just like the millions of plants and trees that flourish because of the care and feeding of their gardeners, we, too, have access to a new solution, the solution for our very lives, custom-made and individually mixed for each one of us. That saving solution, that clear answer, that transforming grace is found in our Creator. The God who loves each and every one of us beyond any vision *we* have and who wants only for us to say "yes": yes to humility, yes to forgiveness, yes to God's love. Let's try this. Amen.

