

Sermon on **Luke 13:1-9** for 3rd Sunday in Lent 2022
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm – Pastor N. Scharf

There are plenty of events in the world today, and even in our own lives, where it would surely be nice to ask Jesus face to face, "Why did this happen to them?" "Why did you allow this to happen to me?" Sometimes we really want to figure out the why. Are you angry at me or them for some sin? Are you teaching me a lesson, and if so, what is it? Are you trying to direct me in a certain way? Is there any reason at all for this, or is it just happenstance of living in a sinful world? What does it mean?

Jesus talked to a great crowd about interpreting the times, being ready for the last day, understanding the difficulty of living in the end times. So the crowd wanted Jesus' interpretation on a disturbing event, "*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.*" Pontius Pilate murdered Galileans as they were offering up their sacrifices in worship, maybe even in the temple courts to the true God. It was a disturbing, offensive, deadly act. Jesus answered, "*Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?*"

Jesus even took it a step further and referenced another event, not a disturbing slaughter, but a tragic accident where 18 people were in the wrong place at the wrong time. "*Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?*" He answers in both cases, "*I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*"

Jesus calls upon that crowd, no doubt a mix of believers and unbelievers, and us today gathered here to worship him, "*Unless you repent, you too will all perish.*" It's the same message he's been preaching around Galilee and Judah, the same message John the Baptist proclaimed in the wilderness. Do we need to repent?

Repent.

1) Jesus knows you.

2) Jesus loves you.

3) Jesus brings forth fruit in you.

We need to repent. Jesus points out Galileans and people of Jerusalem who died suddenly. Jesus doesn't scratch the itch of the wonderers and tell of some secret sin they each had that may or may not have caused God's swift judgment. No, death happens because of sin, not always when we expect it, but God wants us spiritually prepared for it, so that we do not end up in hell, separated from him for all eternity.

Repent. Jesus knows you. He knows we are sinners. That's why he came to this earth – to save sinners. We are sinners with a sinful nature that tries to lead us into sin and far away from Jesus. There are no little sins. Every sin is indicative of a sinful attitude or mindset that lurks and seeks to dominate us. Whether it's our younger years where our sinful nature lashes out uninhibited and we hit and scratch and name call. Or it's our adolescent years where we push the boundaries of God's commands to see what we can get away with or escape with and maybe God is none-the-wiser, or the following years of adulthood where we largely ignore that God is serious about his will for us and his commands, and life and love come so fast with all its ups and downs that we give ourselves a pass to just not think about it, and then on and on as we get more adept at hiding sin, make ourselves more comfortable in our vices. Pride and despair drive us more than we realize to be more self-centered, spiteful, to even look down at God's Law like a buffet from which we choose or choose not.

No doubt there was a good mix of self-righteous pharisee in that group, and loop-hole loving connivers, as well as disbelieving people who kept Jesus and what he had to say at a distance from their hearts. Jesus knows your heart is one big mix of all of those. Jesus says to all, "*Repent.*"

"*Repent.*" It's not some mental theatrics you can coax yourself into. It's not some line you sign on in ink. It's not some action you do. It's what God does to you, to your heart. Jesus knows you. He knows your heart. He sees when it looks away from him, when it is captivated by sin, infected by greed, lust, pride, negligence. Which is it for you now? What is captivating your heart and calling you away?

As an expert physician (or as we'll see gardener), he cuts with his Word, with the realities of his commands, awakens the conscience inside your heart, to realize how corrupt our heart is, how far short we

fall and the offense we give to God and to our fellow mankind whom we are called to love, but so often don't. Sin is not fun, it's harmful to others and to your soul. The first part of repentance is sorrow over sin, fear of God's just judgment for what we have done and failed. Jesus rightly says, *"unless you repent, you too will all perish."* **Jesus knows you. Jesus loves you.**

Jesus works this repentance in different ways. Sometimes he brings so much blessing we realize how foolish we are to cut corners in our covetous hearts to get what we want, and how faithless we are to not trust him. Like the covid patient who got the bill from the hospital for the little while he spent on the respirator and wept not because of the price, but because he realized without it he would have died, and that he never thanked God for the hours, days and years he gave him air for free, and the ability to breath it. Sometimes the Lord works this in more difficult ways that feel like he is angry with us, digging around in our hearts, cutting with spade, and throwing dirt and dung at us with hardships, hurts, warning shots that we have gone too far away from him. Listen to Jesus.

"Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any.'

Jesus tells us about his Father and his desire that all would follow his Son, bringing forth this fruit of repentance. Repentance has two parts 1) sorrow over sin, and 2) faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. Then lives lived in that faith follow full of good and godly works. We too are in God's vineyard. He owns the soil, the nutrients, the water, everything, even the plants. Should he not expect hearts that thank him, praise him, and follow him? God came to this tree patiently and after three years – nothing. No fruit. Would a farmer plant sweet corn again the next year if all that grew were stalks but no ears of corn? This fig tree refused to grow figs. This is the arrogance of impenitence and unbelief. The owner is right to cut such a tree down.

But the man who took care of the vineyard interceded, *"Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"* This is Jesus Christ our Savior. He intercedes for us, for all. He works on hearts digging and fertilizing with whatever is needed to turn us from our sin and sinful ways and point us to him and his cross. All who refuse him and his work can expect nothing but to be cut down, but you see him and trust in him. He has worked this in our hearts. The first part of repentance is sorrow over our sin. The second part of repentance is looking to our Savior and trusting in his work to save us.

What did Jesus do on that cross? The ax was at the root of the tree, and God cut him down in our place, instead of us. It was our faithlessness, our sin, our guilt, but we are spared, because Jesus took our punishment, our penalty, hell. God separated himself from His Son. Jesus cried out, *"My God my God why have you forsaken me."* And so because of Jesus and only in him, God says to you, *"Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you."* Jesus calls you his sheep, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."* Jesus died on that cross to win your forgiveness, to open the way to the Father. He rose to assure your eternal life and God's constant care in your life. **Jesus loves you.**

Jesus brings forth fruit in you. By his Word and Sacraments the Holy Spirit has daily worked repentance and this trust in your heart and thankfulness. He makes your body his temple. Because of God's boundless love to you, he inspires you to serve him. You want to follow his commands knowing that he cares for you and will bless you. God brings forth the fruit of faith in you, and so many wonderful things. You live for him. You manage your life to please God. You struggle against the sin in your life which seeks to separate you from him. Your salvation is a fact. The cross and empty tomb don't change. God has forgiven you because of the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Jesus has made your heart his home. The Holy Spirit strengthens you through this Word. He works daily repentance now - sorrow in your heart over your sin. He points you in faith to your Savior from sin and the forgiveness he won. He works in you to love God and love your neighbor. Do we need to repent? Every day. By God's Grace **Jesus knows you. Jesus loves you. Jesus brings forth fruit in you.** Amen.