

## Unless You Repent... Luke 13:1-9

In the midst of this broken, sin filled world we are often reminded how fragile life is. With wars, senseless killings, natural disasters, diagnosis of a serious disease, our lives can be come to an end. It seems life is but a whisper. In the midst of all this and more many have wondered, "Is God angry" or "What is the point?"

In this morning's gospel some people ask a question as old as human speech. It concerns the slaughter of innocent Galileans by Pontius Pilate's henchmen as they were doing something proper, offering sacrificial offerings. Then their blood was mixed with the blood of their sacrifices. They want to know if they were worst sinners than the rest to have this happen to them.

In my pastoral work, every time the question comes up it seems always new and unnerving. Yet I offer the pastoral response, "I don't believe that God is like that."

However, Jesus answers with what many would consider a harsh response. "No, there is no connection between their sins and Pilate's reign of terror, but let me tell you, unless you repent you too will perish."

Jesus lets His response sink in for a moment. Then He adds to this act of terror a tragic disaster. The tower of Siloam in Jerusalem collapsed and 18 who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time died, "Were they more guilty than the rest living Jerusalem? I tell you unless you repent, you too will perish." Different situations, same results. They all died but let me tell you unless you repent will shall likewise perish.

I find myself cheering Jesus on as he confronts the common notion of the connection of sin, disaster, and suffering; and then at the same time cringing when Jesus tells them that unless you repent you will perish.

Yes, they died. Hopefully not all perished. You see, we will all die. But to perish in this context means after one dies and faces God's judgement and your sins are found against you without Christ, you are cut down and thrown into the fire out God's presence forever.

Not to perish for us means that after we die and face God's judgement our sins are not counted against us because of Christ. Then we are raised to eternal life in heaven in God's eternal presence.

The difference is repentance. Jesus never says unless you are innocent, unless you improve your behavior, or unless you are good, or unless you clean your act. In fact, cleaning up your act is the wrong way to put it. The better and faithful response is to turn to the One who can clean you up and make all things new and the one is Jesus. And that get to what repentance does.

(Perhaps talking about the binding key in the old cooperate Confession and Forgiveness rite, SBH).

Jesus desires that we all turn and change our minds and return to Him with all our heart and mind and to trust His promises. We may watch the evening news and see all the terror and hear about evil deeds of murder perpetrated by one person and shake our self-righteous heads. It easier to see sins in others than ourselves. It is harder to see our own sin. How many of us have shed a tear over our own sin? Paul in Romans 1, "For all have fallen short of the glory of God." And to add to all this may even ask, what is the point of our lives?

For all of us of faith and look to life beyond the here and now, there is a point and it the message that we and the church have share to a wondering world.

God does not desire that we anyone perish. In Ezekiel, The LORD says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they turn from their wicked ways and live. To turn back from their wicked ways." EZK 33:11 "For God so loved the world that all those who believe shall not perish." JHN 3:16 "In Christ God was reconciling the world not counting our sins against us so that we did not perish. " 2 COR 5.

Then Jesus tells a short and simple story to drive home the point. Jesus is concerned about the fruit of repentance in our lives rather than the lack of fruit we see in others. For three years a fig tree has no fruit, the owner is ready to chop it down. If it is bearing no fruit what is the point of it living. And besides, it is taking up space. But the patience of the vinedresser urges the owner to give it more time.

I will put manure and fertilizer around it and tend to it. If it produces fruit good. Then if it bears no fruit cut it down.

When I read parable, I hear the man who is God the Father who says cut down because it is taking up space are said with sorrow and tears. The sorrow is so deep that angels in heaven must be shedding tears. The vinedresser, who is the Dearly Beloved Son of the Father in sympathy with His Father replies, "Let it alone for another year and I will tend to it."

The damage that Adam's fall did in the garden was, "When I heard the sound of thee, I hid myself." Being born in this fallen state we naturally see God as demanding and impossible to please. It takes the Holy Spirit to trust in God's mercy and patience and steadfast love which Jesus witnesses to in this story. And this is what this simple parable shows us. The patience and mercy and steadfast love of God relenting from the disaster he will bring. Who gladly and willingly gives us more time and provides more time and provides more attention for his tree so that we do not perish?

This repentance that Christ calls us to. A complete change of heart and mind about who we call God and who calls us His people. For He indeed long suffering and patient and loving who Jesus presents here. Then every life is precious in His sight.

If I hear this parable in this way, then I, a fruitless tree that I am is still His beloved child. I have been given more time for His Son to work on me and work in me to transform me.

The fruit that the Father is looking for is the fruit of His Son Jesus in our lives. We are no more capable of producing fruit than a fig tree on its own. The fruit that comes is of the Holy Spirit.

So, in the unity of the Holy Trinity, The Father tells the Son to tend to us, The Son and Father use the Holy Spirit to dig around with us with His Word. He loosens the unrepentant hard packed soil around our hearts through His Word, fertilizes it with Christ's body and blood. He does this until we say thanks be to God.

That the same Pilate who mixed the blood with their sacrifices, also mixed the blood of this one Galilean, Jesus Christ with the one sacrifice of all our sins. For by His blood, we are reconciled to God and by the Holy Spirit.

I heard a theologian say, with all the hurt in this world it would have been wonderful for God to whisk me off to heaven at my baptism. But God did not do that. The point is for us to become fruitful people in this broken world.

By sharing the fruit of our hope to others without hope in the midst of tragedy. Using our gifts to build up the Body of Christ. That our turning to God is as natural as breathing. Having the words of Forgiveness on the tip of our tongues.

Enjoy the life in the vineyard.