

3<sup>rd</sup> S. in Lent 2/28/16  
Luke 13:1-9 C

“BUT UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU WILL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH.”

Why? Why is a police officer in Fargo, ND, a husband and father of young children, senselessly killed in the line of duty? Why does cancer end the end of a beloved member of the community, especially at such a young age? Why does a Kansan take a gun and arbitrarily shoot two random strangers he meets on the highway and then shoot more people at his work place, killing several of them?

We struggle with that “why” question in the Christian faith – why do bad things happen to good people? And, that very question shows the thinking of our sinful nature. We are by our very natures, works righteous. We see ourselves as good people and as good people, God better do good things for us – right? And He better not do bad to us, because we are not bad – right?

That’s what the people in our Gospel lesson who came to Jesus were clearly thinking. Evidently, Pilate had slaughtered some Jews from Galilee while they were offering sacrifices in the temple.

It was the thinking of the flesh of these who came to Jesus that this tragedy was punishment for sins -- “Pilate killed these Galileans because they were vile sinners and deserved to die because of it.” “These 18 the tower fell on must have been bad sinners for God to punish them this way.”

Jesus answers them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way... Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?"

Jesus is teaching the truth, but a very unpopular truth. The mirror of the Law shows us that we are not, by nature, good people. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all equally sinful before God. And because of that, each and every one of us deserves only God's temporal and eternal punishment. No one, not one of us, deserves God's grace and favor.

We poor sinners thrive on the foolish notion that "God loves me because I'm a better person than my neighbor." And vice-versa, if something bad happens to that rotten scoundrel neighbor of mine, they have it coming. You do good for God, He'll do good for you, right? But, you do bad for God, and God will do bad to you, right? That's the thinking of our works-righteous, sinful flesh.

So, when bad things happen to us, what are we left to think? "Why me Lord? What have I ever done?" "I'm such a good person, Lord. What I have done to deserve this?"

Yes, we know that we are sinners. But most certainly, I'm not as bad as those other sinners. Yet, we must ever remember that God's ways are not our ways. If you look lustfully at someone who is not your spouse, you are just as guilty of breaking the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment as the homosexual. If you are angry with your neighbor and refuse to forgive and be reconciled, you are just as guilty of breaking the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment as the person who ends another's physical life in murder. If something bad happens and you are filled with self-pity and lament, "Why are you doing this God? I don't deserve this!" refusing to believe that God works good in all things, you are just as guilty of breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment as the Muslim who does not believe God's Word. Do I need to go on?

The problem with you and me is that we think of our sin lightly! When

we think of our sin lightly, when we think its no big deal because everyone else is doing it; when we think we can sin boldly because we can be forgiven anyway; then Luther teaches us to do this:

“For those who are of such a mind that they do not realize their condition I know no better counsel than that they put their hand into their shirts to check whether they have flesh and blood. And if you find that you do, then go, for your good, to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. Hear what sort of a fruit your flesh is: ‘Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and this like these’ (Ga 5). Therefore, if you cannot discern this, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself. Yes, St. Paul further concludes in Romans 7:18, ‘I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh’ (Ro 7).”

Jesus says to each of us, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”. This means you! We must all must repent of our sin, that sin for which we deserve only God’s present and eternal punishment.

The question faith really asks is: Why do good things happen to bad people? Our Lenten banner teaches us “Why”: God so loved you, Dear Child of God. The Good News of the Christian faith is that God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

There is only one who did not deserve death for His sin, because He had no sin -- Jesus Christ. He perfectly obeyed His Father’s will. He did not earn the wages of sin, because He had no sin. And yet, He took your place. He took of every single one of your sins of thought, word, and deed. He carried those sins to the cross and shed His blood -- not for Himself, but

for you and me. The One who did not have to die for His sin died for your sins, so that you would be forgiven.

Jesus had no sin that deserved judgment and death, but He willingly endured it for you. His Easter resurrection was indeed God's absolution for the sins of all the world. His resurrection that 3rd Day proved that God the Father accepted His sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world. Be of good cheer, you are forgiven!

What have you done to deserve such grace and favor? Nothing, absolutely nothing. God's grace in Christ is undeserved, freely given, with no strings attached.

In baptism, that grace is poured out upon us. In that blessed washing of regeneration, God the Holy Spirit enlightens us with His gifts, that is, He gave us saving knowledge of Jesus, our Savior, so that we trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Christ alone.

And, when bad things happen – when the cross becomes heavy, when the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death overwhelms you, when you are frightened little lamb -- remember this: God is not punishing you. He punished His own Son for all of your sins. All the wrath of God against sin was poured out on His only-begotten Son. God has lavished His love on you and you are dearly beloved child.

Yes, God in His grace may allow sorrow, toil, and woe into your life. Even in these, we remember His promise, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good" (Ro 8). God uses these trials to bring us closer to Him.

When God, in His wise grace, permits bad things to enter your life, we must ever remember that we are weak, but His is strong. Living a Christian life means that we must depend on God for strength. Look at the

words of Paul in our Epistle, “God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

“**God is faithful.**” When we are tempted -- especially to think that we know better than God what is best for us or that God is punishing us in some way -- God helps us remember Christ’s victory over Satan, which is our victory. He is ever with us to feed the faith He has begun in our baptism through His Word and with Jesus’ own Body and Blood. He has brought us to faith in Christ and He preserves and keeps us in our faith, through every joy and sorrow of earthly life, until that time He takes us to be with Him in heaven and wipes all the tears from our eyes.