

3rd S. in Lent 3/20/22
Luke 13:1-9 C

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

Why? Why does a gunman stalk homeless men on the streets of New York City and Washington, DC, killing at least two and wounding three others, in a span of less than two weeks? Why does an attacker pummel a 67-year-old Asian woman with over 125 blows? Why does a Minot State student brutally stab her roommate to death, and then live with that knowledge for 15 years? Why does a Communist dictator invade a neighboring country to kill, maim, wound, destroy property; cause untold heartache and grief?

Why? We struggle with that question – why do bad things happen? In our Gospel this morning, that question was very much on the minds of the people. “There were some present at that very time who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (v. 1). These people wanted Jesus to explain why God allows such evil in this world. But notice what Jesus does. He brings another example to their attention:

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (vv.2-5).

It is the popular thinking of the flesh that bad things happen as punishment for sin, right? We love to ask the question, 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. And we show

that works righteousness in our thinking towards God: 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? So, when bad things happen to that rotten, dirty scoundrel neighbor of mine, they have it coming. But, what happens when bad things happen to me? *Why?*

Hear again the words of Jesus,

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (vv. 2-5).

Jesus is teaching the truth, but a very unpopular truth. The mirror of the Law shows us that are not, by nature, good people. All have sinned and fallen short and 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.

My Friends in Christ, the problem with you and me is that we think of our sin lightly! We poor sinners thrive on the foolish notion that “God loves me because I'm a better person than my neighbor.” So, when bad things happen to us, what are we left to think? “Why me Lord? What have I done to deserve this?”

Yes, we know that we are sinners. But most certainly, I'm not as bad as those others sinners. Yet, we must ever remember that God's ways are not our ways. If you look lustfully at someone who is not our spouse, you are just as guilty of breaking the 6th 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 5th 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 3rd Commandment as the Muslim who does not believe God's Word.

The mirror of the Law shows us our sin. And 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.

If you want to see what God thinks of sin – your sins of thought, word, and deed, look at the cross. There is only one who did not deserve death for His sin, because He had no sin -- Jesus Christ. And yet, He humbled Himself to be born of virgin mother and take on human flesh. And in that flesh, 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.

His Easter resurrection was 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, Dear Child of God, you are forgiven!

The question the Christian faith truly asks is: Why do good things happen to bad people? And the answer is: Christ. What have you done to deserve such grace and favor? Nothing, absolutely nothing. God's grace

in Christ is undeserved and freely given.

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.

So that if bad things happen – the cross becomes heavy and the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death overwhelms you -- 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.

If 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. And, the Good News is that Christ does His work in us.

Look at the words of the parable in our lesson,

“Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down” (vv. 8-9).

Just as the vinedresser digs around the roots and fertilizes the fig tree with manure so that it will bear fruit, Christ does His work in us and that is called repentance. Every day, return to the waters of our baptism to drown our sinful flesh, so that we may rise to live in Christ, producing the fruit of love, and peace, and joy and patience, even as we bear a cross. For we know that God is not punishing us, but using even evil and sorrow to draw us closer to Himself; that we may not fear, love and trust in the things of this world, but ... fear, love, and trust in Him above all thing.

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” (1 Co 10:13).

“God is faithful.” 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.