

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Midweek Lent 3 -- March 19th, 2014

Luke 13:1-9

¹Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or 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? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. ⁷So 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. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

⁸“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow forgiven sinners:

Two weeks ago we heard God announce in the Garden of Eden the very first promise to send us a Savior. Last week we focused on how God announces the promise of salvation in Christ to the whole world. Today we look at God’s objective in proclaiming Christ to us. We might call it the Garden of Repentance.

Lent is a journey with Jesus. It is a journey following Jesus. So it is not only a journey in which we see Jesus traveling for us. It is also a journey of following him. When Jesus invites us to follow him, he says to us, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)**. So we begin to understand that following Jesus will not be easy. We will face hardship and ridicule from outside of us. But more than that, we will face a daily battle inside of us. Yes, our journey includes denying self. This means our journey is a journey of repentance. The Holy Spirit clearly shows us this today through the theme,

Theme: A Garden of Repentance!

- 1. Repent or perish**
- 2. God’s Word leads us to repent**

This journey of repentance is an absolutely necessary journey for us. Jesus reminds us of this necessary journey as he addresses some of the front page news of his day. We can easily identify with this account as we hear the reports of earthquakes, murders, terrorism, and the like. So Luke shares with us this account that almost sounds like something from our own evening news. **Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”**

By nature we walk a wrong road in regard to sin. It is a road that paints a wrong view of what God is doing. It suggests that perhaps God is not in control of things. It infers that God is aloof and uncaring. It questions God’s motives. It judges God’s decisions without knowing all the facts. It suggests that God is not fair in his punishment of people. We look at the happenings of the world around us, the atrocities inflicted on innocent people, the accidents that happen and we wonder if God is really just.

There is a fork in this wrong road. Sometimes we focus on the people involved in the bad things that happen. We fall victim to that temptation to focus on the sins of others in hopes that perhaps my sins won't look so bad. So we look at the victims of crime and accident and insist that they must have had it coming. Occasionally that may be the case – but that is God's business, not ours. Most often God's will in these matters remains unknown to us, hidden. So what would Jesus have us think about the bad things that happen to people in life? What are we to contemplate when we hear of natural disasters and accidents and murders? Let Jesus' words ring in your ears - **But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**

Dear Christians, remember Jesus' invitation! **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.** So let us talk about daily repentance in the light of taking up your cross. What do we mean by the cross? The cross is everything that I suffer and that the church suffers as a result of its connection and faithfulness to Christ and his Word. At every turn that suffering has at its heart and core the denial of self, yes the struggle against self. At the heart of cross bearing is denying self. So let's talk about the battle we are in against our sinful nature. The sinful nature pushes us to be selfish. The sinful nature wants everyone to serve me. The sinful nature looks out for good old number one. Paul summarizes in his letter to the Galatians: **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** The only people who struggle against the sinful nature are those who have received God's gift of faith in Christ. Dear Christians, we all bear this cross. We are in a daily battle with the sinful nature. Repentance is the remedy.

Jesus hits us with his straight talk. Unless you repent, you too will all perish. In our world we measure worth and status by our accomplishments. So it's only natural that we carry that attitude over to our relationship with God. We think that what matters is that we're above average, and we have the idea that God must be fairly well-satisfied with us. Yet each of us, in his or her own way, stands guilty before God. Despite our good reputations and the admiration of our peers, we are guilty as sin. We stand condemned by the evil things we have done and by the good things we have left undone. Repentance is the remedy.

Jesus does not answer the questions that arise in connection with the calamities and catastrophes of life. The questions of "Why did God let that happen? Why would he permit the lives of some to be snuffed out, while others escaped? Etc." The answers to these questions must wait for eternity. Instead, Jesus urges us to hear, in such events, a call to repentance. That call is meant for us. We are baptized Christians. In baptism God received us into his covenant grace. Living our lives under that covenant, we carry on a constant struggle against our sinful flesh that would lead us away from our blessed life under grace. Such a struggle means that our daily life is a life of daily contrition (sorrow over our sins) and repentance (trusting that in Jesus all is forgiven). Perhaps we recall the words of the Fourth Part of Baptism from the Small Catechism – "Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Baptism is not a one-time thing, that becomes meaningless to us as we mature – baptism is a way of life. Dear friends, relive your Baptism every day. For more information about this read Romans 6. This daily journey of repentance is absolutely necessary for us. Without it we will fall away from our dear Savior.

As Jesus speaks about our journey of repentance, he also reminds us by way of a parable to use the time of grace wisely. **A man had a fig tree planted 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. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' '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.'**

The point Jesus makes is that life is short. The length of our journey in this world is unknown. All the time we have is a gift of God's grace. God wants us to use our time to hear his gospel. God graciously reaches out to us through his Son, through his Spirit, through his Word. Oh, what compassion Jesus has on us. He is willing to come to us through his Word and sacraments to dig around us and fertilize us to

strengthen our trust in him and to encourage us to produce fruit.

With every accident, calamity, natural disaster, act of war or terrorism our merciful God taps us on the shoulder. He mercifully reminds us that the time is short. He faithfully focuses us on the things that really matter most for us and for our children. It is the cross that he wants us to fix our eyes on. Sure life consists of worries and cares, working and earning a pay check, paying bills and buying groceries. But friends, by God's grace you know that life is so much more than that! You know that life is a time to prepare for eternity. You know that life is about receiving comfort from your loving God. You know that life is about serving others as our Savior served us. Today God reaches out to you to remind you of the proper priorities in life. Please listen to him! Pay attention to the gracious reminders he sends your way!

Jesus wants us to use the time of grace to know him. This suggests that church, Sunday school, Bible classes are important priorities for us. This suggests that we renew our support of Christian education on all levels. Life is about a relationship with our merciful Father in heaven – don't fall victim to the devil's lies about your faithful God!

Jesus wants us to take up our crosses every day and follow him. Sure life is tough. The daily grind becomes unbearable. We find ourselves so busy with such mundane things it makes us crazy. We find ourselves so bored that life seems worthless. We need to keep focused on Jesus. He gives us a sense of calm in our frenzied lives. He gives us a sense of purpose instead of boredom. Stay on the path, keep journeying with Jesus. He is leading you to the heaven that he has won for you!

Jesus wants you to show fruits of faith. When he invites you to serve, he doesn't want the yea buts of Moses. He wants the response of Isaiah, "Here am I! Send Me!" When he asks you to follow him, he doesn't want the grumbling and moaning of the Israelites – he wants the calm following of the apostles who understood that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus wants you sitting in these pews eagerly hearing his Word. Jesus also wants you to leave this place and put what you have heard into practice. Yes, show your faith in Christ in what you do, what you say, how you act. Jesus takes this very seriously. In fact, without fruits our faith is in grave danger. Lord, cause us to hear your Word with eager hearts and cause us to live your Word as if our eternity depended on it!

Live your life on the path following Jesus. For you this is a path of repentance. The path can be long and grueling. But Jesus comes to us in love and says, "Peace be with you!" He says, "Your sins are forgiven!" He says, "You belong to me!" He says, "Bear fruit – fruit that will last." We say, "Yes, Lord! Help us to live for you comforted by your great love!" Amen.