

Luke 13:1-9  
"Repent, or Perish!"  
Third Sunday in Lent

March 24, 2019  
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

*[Warning of Ezekiel]*

I hate to break it to you, but today's Christians are no different than the First Century Jews, or really even the Fifth Century B.C. Israelites.

We, like the Jews before us, cry out: "***The way of the Lord is not just!***" (Ezekiel 33:17)

*Why can't I do what I want?! I'm not hurting anybody!*

So, instead of reading God's Word as it is – God's Word **for** us. Many times, Jews then and Christians today wish to "improve" on God's Word, by making it "more friendly" to outsiders.

But, how does God respond to this?

***"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"*** (Ezekiel 33:11a).

As Christians, we are to turn back from our evil, sinful ways and warn other Christians against evil. If we don't warn others against evil, **we** will be counted among the evil, even if we believe we are living a godly life.

Recently, our brothers and sisters in Christ of the worldwide United Methodist Church met for a special conference in St. Louis. This conference was all about interpreting God's Word.

One faction spoke with the vigor of Ezekiel to remain faithful and penitent to the church's teachings. This faction, which was primarily African, proposed the "Traditional Plan," which kept with the church's teachings on sin.

The other faction cried out like the unrighteous Jews of Ezekiel's time: "*The way of the Lord is not just!*" This faction, which was primarily American, proposed the "One Church Plan," which aimed to redefine sin and especially say that all sexual lifestyles are pleasing to God.

The vote at this special conference went in favor of the "Traditional Plan," however the "One Church Plan" crowd said they would vigorously continue defying God's teachings on sin and sexuality – this is two-thirds of the delegates of the United Methodist Church in the United States, including the bishop that represents the Minnesota Conference.

Sadly, the divisions within the United Methodist Church could easily happen within our own church body – the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. We are sinners, too, and many times we want to live *our* lives *our* way, rather than God's way.

The Lord tells us all: "*I will judge each of you according to his ways*" (Ezekiel 33:20b), but also know that if the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live. (Ezekiel 33:19)

### ***[Call to Repentance]***

Today is the Third Sunday in Lent. We are making our way throughout our Lenten journey. Throughout this journey, we are reminded that none of us are perfect on our own. We are all lost and condemned sinners. We need to repent of our sin. We all need a savior so we can be forgiven.

In our gospel lesson this morning, our Lord and Savior Jesus teaches us that each and every one of us needs to repent, or else we will perish.

And *true* repentance isn't being sorry for just getting caught doing the wrong thing, such as getting caught lying or getting caught cheating.

Today, Jesus is teaching us about judgement and forgiveness for the penitent.

So, what spurred Jesus to teach about judgment and forgiveness this morning?

Well, there were some Galileans who believed that some other Galileans must have really sinned badly against God, because Pilate sent his troops into the temple area to murder them as they brought their lambs for the Passover Seder.

What happened was the blood of the people was mixed with the blood of their lambs, which is to *never* happen. This violated all holiness codes.

These Galileans thought this tragedy happened to those people as a divine punishment for specific sins.

So Jesus responds to their concern saying: “*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*” (Luke 13:2-3).

These Galileans who questioned Jesus likely hoped to get some strong rebuke against Pilate and Rome, but instead Jesus gives them just the opposite to what they were looking for.

You see, Jesus sees this tragedy in a religious context and speaks *not* of the sin of Pilate, *but* of the sin of the Jews.

But, what did these Jews do to deserve this massacre?! They were just bringing their sacrifices to the temple!

Where is the *all-loving* Jesus that we often hear about in our culture? He isn't here. In fact, Jesus loves by teaching us the truth. And sometimes, the truth hurts.

Jesus teaches us that these Galileans were no more sinners than any other Galilean, but that every one of them must repent for they all have sinned against God in thought, word and deed.

The same goes with us. We call out the speck in our neighbor's eye, but ignore the log in our own eye. We all have sinned. We are all heading down the wrong road apart from God.

Our only way of survival is to repent and believe that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus.

### *[Tower in Siloam]*

If the Galileans still didn't get it. Jesus brings up another recent tragedy.

These Galileans suffered a tragedy caused by a human event by the command of Pilate. But, Jesus brings up the 18 who died in a tragedy of a natural cause.

Jesus said: ***“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”*** (Luke 13:4-5).

The tower collapse in Siloam evidently lacks political or religious overtones, but Jesus describes it as a sign ***just like*** the deaths at the temple.

Jesus is not saying that *“they must have deserved it,”* but rather, *“We **all** deserved the same.”* Because of our unbelief, we **all** deserve destruction and death.

For the Triune God: sin is sin. There is no ranking of the worst sins to not-so-bad sins.

Jesus speaks twice in our text, ***“I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”*** (Luke 13:3, 5).

Through His repetition, He means that repentance is of the first importance as a follower of Christ.

### ***[The Fig Tree]***

The One true God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but there will come to a point when the unrighteous will perish.

Jesus tells us this parable of a fig tree planted in the vineyard as an illustration of this.

A man said to the vinedresser, ***“Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?”*** (Luke 13:7).

The vinedresser responded saying, ***“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”*** (Luke 13:8-9).

Here Jesus is reminding us that God *is* patient with His people, but *only* for a little while longer.

So, there will come a time when God will cut down the unrighteous, impenitent tree from the vineyard.

With this in mind, we may ask ourselves this question: *Am I bearing fruit?*

Think of it this way: a plant must receive enough water and sunlight or else it will surely die. Like plants, we must receive nourishment for our faith, or else our faith will shrivel up and die. So, how does our faith bear fruit?

Our faith can only bear fruit when it is fertilized through hearing God's Word and receiving God's Sacraments. And, the only place this always happens is right here in the Divine Service where we receive forgiveness and strength for our weak faith through hearing God's Word, receiving absolution and receiving the Lord's Supper. Here is where God nourishes our faith and then our faith sprouts fruit.

From God's nourishment, we grow in the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This parable shows God's patience for all of us as God gives us the opportunity to repent from our evil ways, and thus be forgiven through Christ.

The focus of this parable is on whether there will be fruit before the removal of that tree.

For those who remain fruitless will face the judgment when Christ returns. They *will* be cut down. They *will* perish.

But, for those who receive God's nourishment in Word and Sacrament, they become the fruit of the tree! They *will* receive eternal joy! They *will* receive the kingdom of God!

*[Jesus Provides a Way Out from Perishing in Sin]*

Jesus is calling us to live our lives in repentance. We will step into sin from time to time, because of our fallen nature, but we are to repent of that sin and follow Jesus.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that *“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 Corinthians 10:13).

This way of escape is only through Jesus the Christ. Without Christ, we are trapped in the bondage of sin, death, hell and Satan. But in Christ, we receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

You see, God the Father has given us a way out from our tree being cut down and thrown into the fire and that way is through His only begotten Son, Jesus.

Jesus provides us a way out through Him fulfilling the Law. Jesus provides a way out through His suffering and death. Jesus provides a way out through His resurrection and ascension.

By grace through faith in Jesus, and remaining true to God’s unchanging and loving Word, we are forgiven. We are righteous. We are children of God.

But, when we turn from God’s unchanging and loving Word, we are turning from salvation and toward damnation. However, God gives us time to repent, but how much time?

Thanks be to God that when we repent and follow Jesus as Lord. We will never perish! We live! We are immediately seen as righteous! All that we did against God prior is erased! It’s gone! We are seen as God the Father sees Jesus: perfect in every way.

And in case there are any doubts: Again, God forgives our sins and strengthens our weak faith at each Divine Service. He does this through holy absolution, hearing the Word of God and receiving the Lord’s Supper. Here is where God puts fertilizer on our faith as we grow as fruit in the one true Christian faith! Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠