

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?' ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?' ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

⁶ Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" ⁸He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."'

Get Ready and Be Ready

In the movie "Lincoln" that came out in 2012, there is a scene where President Lincoln is telling the story of a man who had a parrot, and the parrot was constantly squawking, "Today is the day that the world shall end." The man grew tired of hearing this and one day killed the parrot, thus fulfilling the prophecy, for the bird at least.

There are some of Christians, and there always will be those, who are kind of like that parrot; they proclaim "today is the say that the world shall end." They believe that they have special insight into the plan that the God of all creation has for the demise this planet. There was a well-publicized prediction several years ago, and the day he had predicted the end would come and went, and as one member here called out the score: God 1; radio preacher 0. Like the parrot in Lincoln's story, his prophecy was fulfilled...for him at least.

There are people who aren't nearly so specific about the date of the world's ending, but they will say that we are living in "the end times." That kind of statement leaves the door open for interpretation. That kind of statement is easier for us to believe and receives more attention when some catastrophe strikes or the effects of global warming are felt. The invention of the atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb has probably led to more talk about "the end times."

And regardless of whether or not there is an asteroid out there that has our name on it, I would like to make two points from today's scripture reading: the first is that, like the parrot in Lincoln's little parable, we will face our "end of the world," maybe not by way of a global catastrophe but by the sickness or accident or crime or natural causes; sometimes we're given lots of warning, and sometimes the end comes like a thief in the night. The second point is that the certainty and unpredictability of that "end time" for each of us should impact everything we do today. We shouldn't have to fret or live in fear or anxiety over our "end time," but we should always have it in the back of our mind.

To the first point – that death comes to us all – we must remember that death is indiscriminate. That's the point that Jesus is making when the disciples ask him if there's any connection to the horrible death suffered by some Galileans at the hands of a rather brutal Roman governor named Pontius Pilate, who not only killed these guys did it in a way that was repulsive to any good Jew, in a way that they would see as offensive to God, a way that would make them question their own fate in the hands of that God as they themselves were defiled by the blood of idols. **No**, Jesus says, those men did nothing to deserve such a demeaning and humiliating death, nor did those eighteen folks who died when a tower collapsed. It's important for our mental health that we grasp this truth that ***bad things happen to good people just as good things happen to bad people***. Your suffering and your poverty do not have anything to do with how you stand before God, nor does your health and your wealth. We can all think of times that we've said of someone else, "He didn't deserve that," as we've probably said to ourselves, "I don't deserve this," whether what we're talking about is something good or bad. Karma doesn't always work, at least in matters of health and welfare.

But Jesus' answer to the disciples question has two parts; first he says, "no, those folks who died in those tragedies did nothing wrong, and then he says, *"but you too will perish as they did if you don't repent."* Jesus says this twice – repent, or you will perish like these – and that's the second point he's making. Jesus is not exactly saying that you will avoid an untimely and cruel death if you repent, but rather he's saying that we must always be ready to die. Let's face it people; death scares us; it's a big reason why people come to church later in life. It's a big reason people who are dying in a hospital want to see a priest or a chaplain. And while we all come to grips with our own mortality, we really hate it when people die suddenly, unexpectedly, tragically. I think that Jesus was responding to the fact that those people the disciples are talking about are people who died that way, who died a tragic death. And it upset them as it upsets us.

I think one of the reasons it upsets us is maybe, because deep down, we're afraid of dying too soon. But what does that mean, "too soon"? Some people would say "Any time is too soon," but if you talk someone who has lived 99 years and had a very joyful and fruitful life, she would tell you that she is ready. Too soon means before you're ready, and what Jesus is saying is that *if you haven't repented, you're not ready*. And repentance is not confession. No sooner do some people confess their sins than they've committed a new sin. Repentance is about doing everything that Jesus tells us to do, and the most important thing Jesus says that we need to do is to love God and love one another. None of us do that perfectly, but we have to live by that value. And loving God IS loving our neighbor; Jesus says as much in the 25th chapter of Matthew: "Inasmuch as you've done this for the least of these my brothers and sisters you've done it for me." The reason Jesus speaks of repenting in the context of these deaths is because people need to be ready to die anytime. And so you need to fix whatever is broken in any relationship that you have. *There's a very simple rule that we should all live by: whenever you part company with someone, you should consider that it may be the last time you see that person. Do you want to part on good terms or bad terms?* Do you want there to be any bad blood between you and anyone? My friends, we don't know when our day will come. Make peace with everyone you know. Will that guarantee peace in this world? No, because we

choose the people we interact with, so there are those we choose NOT to interact with, and it's all too easy to NOT love people we don't know. But we can start with the people you know. Make peace with everyone you know.

There is a third point that Jesus makes; in the second part of this passage, the parable of the fig tree, Jesus is telling us that God is patient with us. You and I are the fig trees in this story, and God is expecting us to bear fruit, and that fruit is the love of God shared with others through you. Some people live their entire life and never learn to love, never bear fruit. And that's a double tragedy, because they fail to know the love of Christ, and they fail to share the love of Christ. They are trees that can't bear fruit.