

MARCH 20, 2022 TURN, TURN, TURN
Our Gospel comes from Luke 13:1-9

A man was sitting in a coffee shop, waiting on a friend.
They had known each other for many years.
They had grown up together.
But on this particular Sunday morning, as he waited, his friend was late.
So as the man was sitting in the coffee shop, thumbing through his newspaper, he began to wonder what was taking his friend so long.
Seems he had been going through some changes lately, his friend.
Recently, his father had passed and that whole experience seemed to have changed him.
Like I said, they knew each other for years, they grew up together, same neighborhood.
Went through the schools together and used to go to church on Sundays, but they had long ago stopped going.
Of course, they knew all about Jesus.
And I suppose if you were to ask this man, do you believe in Jesus?
Chances are pretty good he'd say yeah, sure I do.
And if you were to ask him, well, do you think you're a good person?
Chances are pretty good he'd say, well, yeah. You know, good enough.
But you know, church really wasn't his thing.
But like I said, his friend had been going through some changes, it's hard to say what, but he had started to feel anxious.
Started to ask the big questions, you know, questions like, why am I here?
Does my life have any meaning?
Where did God go?
You know, those kinds of questions.
And those questions led him back to church.
Started participating in on-line Bible studies and all along, he was asking his friend, you know, the one that's waiting at the coffee shop, to join him, but he wasn't interested 'cause like I said, church wasn't really his thing.
He didn't get much out of it. You know how it is.
So as this man is sitting there drinking his coffee, reflecting on his friend, and wondering why he was so late, his phone rang.
It was his girlfriend, and she was wailing and crying hysterically and she blurted out, "Tom's dead."
Of course, Tom being the friend that he was waiting on.
Evidently, he had been hit by a car that morning as he was walking to church.
And as the man stared into his coffee with the tears starting to flow, he cried out, "Why? Why did this happen? Why do bad things happen to good people?"

Well, my friends, that's a question that has rung down through the centuries.

And may I suggest that it is precisely that question that motivates our gospel today.

"Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices."

Now, we don't have a historical record of exactly what these people are talking about, but we can make a few assumptions.

Beginning with the fact that we know that Pilate was a vicious killer, and he would often have Jews killed for a little to no reason.

Like I said, we don't have a historical account of this exact event, but we can assume that these Galileans were making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to make their blood sacrifices because that's what they did.

But something happened.

Now keep in mind, Pilate, as prefect of Rome, had really only two responsibilities.

Number one, to keep the taxes flowing and number two, to keep the peace.

That was it.

So given that scenario, Pilate was in constant, while he was in a constant state of paranoia, about any possible revolt.

And Pilate was excessively cruel. Sounds like today, doesn't it?

So cruel that the prefects in the surrounding area complained to Rome about his excessive cruelty, and eventually he was removed.

And in the end, things didn't go well for Pilate.

Not sure exactly what happened.

Some say he was executed by the emperor

Caligula. Others say he committed suicide.

Either way in the end, his body was thrown into the Tiber River.

Like I said, it did not end well for Pilate.

But getting back to this, when we read the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices, we can assume that as they were making their sacrifices in the temple, they were cut down by Pilate's army.

Now, I'm guessing the primary motivator of these people that are telling this story is because they're wondering, why?

Why would God allow such an evil thing to happen?

This is a question that we continue to struggle with today. Every time there's a school shooting, or maybe a church or a synagogue comes under attack, or a young child chasing a ball into the street gets run over by a car, why does this happen? Russia/Ukraine!

If God is all love and all powerful, then why does He allow evil things to happen to good people?

Now, it's interesting how Jesus responds to this because He doesn't really respond to it at all because He's got His mind on a different issue. It's an issue that we will see time and time again. "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were greater sinners than other Galileans? By no means. But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will perish as they did."

And He goes on to say, "Or those 18 people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Do you think that they were more guilty than everybody else that lived in Jerusalem? By no means. But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will perish as they did."

Now, before we talk about what Jesus really wants to talk about today, which is repentance, let's get back to that first question.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

There're really two competing schools of thought here.

One says that evil is never in the will of God, and bad things happening to good people would never be ordained from on high.

That would not be a part of God's will.

But then there's a second school of thought that says, no, that's not true because there is nothing that happens that is outside of God's will.

I'm talking all the good, all the bad. So, this our theological quandary.

The first school of thought starts with the premise that we live in a fallen world.

And as we struggle with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, often fruit rolls out of that tree that is evil and causes chaos, like the drunk driver who smashes into a family of four and everybody dies. Or just this week, I was asked to pray for a 12-year-old little girl that's got a brain tumor and for our 90+ members, or the thousand of other things that cause pain and suffering to innocent people.

Is that the will of the Father?

Well, the first camp would say no because all that bad stuff is never in God's will, but because of the free will that He gave us, the gift of free will, sin has entered into this world and corrupted God's perfect will.

Now there's another camp that says, no, that's not true. Nothing happens outside of God's will.

There is nothing that happens on this earth that is not ordained by God.

Nothing.

Nothing.

So, which is it?

Well, I don't know.

His ways are higher than our ways.

And the day I decide that I must fully understand all things is the day that I have made myself God.

And I went to seminary and I learned two things.

Number one, there is a God.

And number two, it ain't me.

Why do bad things happen to good people.

It's a question that people have been asking since the dawn of time.

And I brought it up because it seems that that question is what motivated the story about the Galileans that they told to Jesus in our gospel today.

But it's pretty clear that Jesus is not interested in answering that question because He wants to talk about something else.

And what He wants to talk about is a subject that we see Him bring up time and time again throughout His ministry.

It's a message that came first from the lips of John the Baptist at the banks of the Jordan, "the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel."

Now, we need to understand that these people, within Judaism at the time, their theological construct was that they believed that if something bad happened to you, and that's any kind of disease or physical deformity, that meant that you're cursed and God didn't like you.

It was connected to sin somehow.

Remember the blind man?

The disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned? This man or his parents?"

That's what they believe.

Today, Jesus is clearly going against that as He points out that, you know what?

You guys, you know better. You're no more righteous.

You're no more favored than those that you saw die in such a violent way.

And there's a real lesson here for us because it's very easy for us to get lulled into this idea that, well, you know, we're on the A team.

We're wearing the white hats, you know? We're good people, at least good enough.

And we're gonna go to heaven someday because we are favored.

Jesus is putting His finger in our faces today and saying, "I wouldn't get too comfortable."

We can never assume that we're good enough because there is no such thing as good enough.

If there were, we wouldn't need Jesus, but we do.

And what does Jesus want from us?

He wants us to repent, which is not an easy thing to do. Repent, that's a tough word.

Repent.

It's a hard word.

Lot of sting in that word, repent.

A lot of people think that repent means well, you feel really bad about something.

You have remorse over something you've done.
Something is causing you great shame, but that's not repentance.
That's called contrition.
And don't get me wrong.
I mean, that's a good thing.
It can be a good place to start, but it's not repentance because repentance is not a feeling.
It's not an emotion.
It's not an adjective. Repentance is a verb.
You have to do something. It's an action.
And what you have to do is, you have to change.
And change, that's not easy.
Change is hard for people.
I know I'm a people, and change is hard for me.
But hear me when I say the greatest response we can make to the Gospel is change.
If you've been watching this program "Daily Living" for years, yet you have not changed in any way as a result of the show, then I failed you because that's the whole point.
That's why we're here.
I mean, we try to make it fun.
Happy to entertain you, but we wanna make it informative and educational.
That's all fine.
But if you ain't changing, I mean, even a little bit, then I failed you.
Because once again, **the greatest response that we can give the Gospel is change.**
If you're the same person that you've always been, even the last five years, then you're not responding to the Gospel because the Gospel requires change.
And how do we change?
Repent.
That's how we change.
And repentance requires judgment on past behavior along with a deliberate redirection for the future.
The Greek word for repent is **metanoia**, which means a change in direction.
Now, that might start with a feeling, but that feeling must lead to action because repentance is more than a feeling.
You've got to do something.
And once again, sorrow and shame might be a good place to start.
I have come to find that the greatest motivation for change is pain.
But I've also come to find that the elevator to hell has a lot of floors.
And the floor that you finally decide to get off on is really up to you and only you.
So, in the end, it's not about your pain at all.
It's what you're willing to do with your pain.
Are you willing to turn?
And the thing about turning, it means by definition that you're turning away from something else.
And that's why Jesus came.

He's calling us to turn.
"I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
And it gives Him great joy when He sees His children turn.
In fact, next week we'll be reading all about the Prodigal Son, which is connected with the parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.
And Jesus says, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 persons who need no repentance."

And I'm still trying to figure out who those 99 are, but what does repentance look like?
Well, it might begin with shame, but it can't end there. It must involve a turning away.
You have to stop doing what you're doing.
Turn away from sin and return to God.
Getting back to our two friends at the top of the show. One was in the process of turning.
He was repenting.
While the other, well, didn't really see the need.
Why?
Because he had become comfortable in his sin nature.
That man represents the problem with Christianity today.
We add Christ to our lives, but we do not subtract sin.
We might change our belief, but we don't change our behavior.
Its **revival without reformation.**
And that, is not repentance. We have lost our sense of sin. Why?
Because we have lost our fear of the Lord.
If I was to walk out onto the streets of Richmond, or anywhere in this country for that matter, and asked somebody coming by, do you fear divine judgment?
The vast majority of people would say, not really.
Why?
Because there is no fear of the Lord.
There was once a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard.
And when he came in search of fruit on it and found none, he said to the gardener, "For three years now, I've come in search of fruit on this fig tree and have found none, so cut it down.
Why should it exhaust the soil?"
He said to him in reply, "Sir, leave it for this year also. I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it. It may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down."
Now, I want you to imagine this.
The owner of the land is God your Father who planted you in this world.
And Jesus is the gardener.
Now imagine you're that fig tree and you overheard that conversation.

You think that might put the fear of the Lord in you then?

Jesus is telling us today that because of our habitual sin and lack of repentance, we're not bearing fruit.

And the one who has created us is coming to inspect our fruit and has found us wanting.

Meanwhile, Jesus is saying, "Father, let me just till the soil, even use a little manure, and see what it does in a year, or three years, or five years, or maybe a lifetime."

You know, I often wonder what manure Jesus has used to fertilize my tree.

You know, **painful manure** comes in many ways, but it definitely grew my tree. *Someone may have gotten hit by a car, or a sudden death happens in the family, job loss, divorce, or a Cancer diagnosis. That is your manure!*

And I'm not alone.

Talk to anybody that has had a near death experience and they'll tell you the same.

That kind of thing tends to clarify.

You find out pretty quick who your friends are.

What's important, what's not.

It's a funny thing, but it is true.

But for many of us, we have to almost die or wish we were dead before we learn how to live.

It certainly woke me up.

I don't see things the same way today. I act different.

Metanoia, I have turned. What are you? Are you a sinner or a sinner saved by grace?

What can we learn from this gospel today?

How can we apply this into our life?

Well, let's start by getting back to that message.

You know, that old message, that message that first came from the banks of the Jordan.

"The Kingdom of God is upon you. Repent and believe in the Gospel."

That message.

You know, and speaking of repentance, it is far easier to repent of the sins that we have committed than to repent of those that we intend to continue to commit.

Because like many of us, we are that first friend in the coffee shop.

We have become comfortable in our habitual sin.

Figuring, why repent?

Isn't that what the cross is all about? Remember the horizontal bar in the cross is important, it is the reaching out to every neighbor. God and me is easy, me and my neighbors is the troubled area.

Hear me when I say, my friend, yes, Jesus died for your sins.

That is true.

But He did not die for the sins in which you refuse to repent.

You are that fig tree.

You are designed to bear fruit.

When your Father comes to inspect your fruit, what is He gonna find?

Yes, my friend. That's the question.

When your Father comes to inspect your tree, will He find any fruit or will He find it bare?

If you are dragged into court and accused of the crime of being a Christian, **would there be enough evidence to convict you?**

Our lack of fruit is directly connected with our lack of repentance.

I challenge you this week, take a good long look at your life.

What habitual sin do you continue to practice these days?

Repent. Turn away.

Your Father who created you is watching as His Son is trying to tend your soil.

Two men went for coffee. Which one are you?

Rev. Katie Dailey, pastor

First United Church of Christ

68651 S. Forest

Richmond, MI 48062

cell 586-202-8644

daileystory@gmail.com

*Our 'Silent Auction' during our game night is on for **April 2**. Put it on your calendar. It is time we had more socials; it is time to have some **fun** together. We need to break bread together at other times than in worship at communion. Invite your family and friends to participate. KatieD+*