

March 20, 2022  
Third Sunday After Lent

“God’s Call to You”

Luke 13:1-9

It’s hard not to be worried these days. Covid was bad and Ida was devastating. But there was a brief moment after the storm where I think a lot of us said, “Okay. The worst is over. Things are going to get better now.” But that sentiment was short-lived.

Now an aggressive world power is making war in Europe and talking about nuclear weapons and a much more powerful world power in Asia is threatening forceful expansion and, just in case you missed it last year, also threatening to use nuclear weapons. A lot of news outlets are talking about the real possibility of World War Three. Closer to home we’re facing rocketing prices on everything, shortages of commodities and supplies, and the real possibility of major recession. The last couple years have been a freak show of badness and yet the future looks like it might make us long for the good old days of 2021.

And if you showed up here this morning hoping for some comforting words from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you’re probably pretty disappointed with what you’ve received: *“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Galileans go to Jerusalem to for a Jewish festival and are slaughtered by Pilate right in the temple. Some folks in Siloam are just going through their day and a tower falls on them. Bad things happen...to all people. Bad things don’t happen to folks because they’re worse sinners than others. Everybody sins; everybody dies. Wars, famines, disasters, plagues, hurricanes, recessions—they’re the result of a world fallen into sin. Jesus says we are all bound to be victims of this badness in the first death, and warns us to avoid the second one. *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

The parable that follows doesn’t seem to be all that comforting either: *“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he 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?’ And he answered him, ‘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.’”*

You can’t walk away from that one without the feeling that you’re under the gun to bear some fruit...and maybe you’re not even sure what the fruit is! Just so you know, the immediate context strongly indicates the fruit here is faithful repentance of your sins. But we have a lot of doubts about if we’re even doing that well enough.

In our epistle Paul says pretty clearly about temptation to sin: *“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.”* Yet we so often don’t take that escape route even when it isn’t that difficult to do so! Think about it; how many times a day do you sin when the only thing it would take not to sin is to keep your mouth shut? Walk away? Take a deep breath and say a quick prayer? But we don’t.

It’s kind of a weird Sunday when the clearest proclamation of the Gospel in the readings comes from the Old Testament prophet: *“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; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”* Here the wonderful, forgiving nature of

God is made plain; yet again there is the exhortation of “turn back,” do the repentance that we seem to perform so badly.

So yes, it is a dark world indeed. Everybody sins, everybody dies. And the road to that end is fraught with calamities and hardships around us and temptations and sin within us. So where can we find comfort today?

Well, there is another theme to these readings today and it is quite wonderful. What is it that God is doing through the prophet, through the apostle, through His own human lips in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? He is calling to you, again and again and again.

For sure a truth in that parable about the fig tree is that there is a judgment. But the truth of the parable is that there is still time to turn, bear fruit and be saved. The exhortation of Paul is that, living under God’s grace and forgiveness, we continue to strive against temptation because we are indeed God’s children. And yes, you can’t miss the threat in God’s voice as He speaks through Ezekiel, but the purpose of that threat is that you listen to it, turn and be saved. God loves you so, and wants you to be saved.

But the greatest comfort to be had is that the awful truth Jesus speaks to these folks—everybody sins, everybody dies—is the truth that He has come to nullify. Remember, Jesus isn’t God wearing a skin suit for a little while and then taking it off; He is one hundred percent a human being. Jesus doesn’t sin—but Jesus dies. That’s an incredible thing right there. Jesus doesn’t sin—but Jesus dies. That He dies is proof your sins go to His grave as God promises! It has to be...or Jesus doesn’t die.

That Jesus—100 percent human Jesus—rises from the dead means that the promise of eternal life is yours, despite those sins...which are, mind you, now dead in His grave. So how do we react to all of this?

Um, repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. Repent.

Do you repent well? Maybe, maybe not. But repent. Strive to live our repentant life better. When you fail, repent. When you really fail badly, repent. When you fail for the thousandth time, repent. Turn back to Jesus and beg forgiveness in repentance. Repentantly remember the promise of forgiveness in your Baptism. Repent and receive forgiveness in His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. Repentantly read those same old words of the confession in the hymnal for the umpteenth time and be absolved. Repent. Repent. Repent.

Yes, there is lots of scary judgment in the readings today; but the message is repent. God is calling to you, yes you, personally you, lovingly to you, dare I say begging you to repent and be saved in that judgment.

It is indeed hard not to be worried these days. It is a dark, dangerous, deceitful world outside and looking inward we find sin, decay and death. But what is Jesus saying about that here? Look at me instead! Repent of all that darkness and look to my light of salvation. Me, God, Savior, lover of your soul; I am calling to you saying “Repent...and live.”

Amen.