

The Third Sunday of Lent

February 28, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, look with favor on your humble servants and stretch out the right hand of your power to defend us against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:14,15)

Sermon Text: Luke 13:1-9

“She worked here nineteen years! She knew what she was doing. How could this happen to her?” That was the discussion at the lunchroom table. Their co-worker had worked the packaging line for nineteen years. She kept debris from jamming the conveyor belt carrying blocks of Kraft cheese. If a stray piece of cardboard or some saran wrap film jammed one of the gears, she was to stop the machine, power it down, lock the “Off”-switch, and then clear the jam.

During her first years she would un-jam the conveyor belt by stopping the machine, powering it down, and locking the “Off”-switch. As the years went by, she got better at snagging pieces of dangling cardboard or plucking out saran wrap from the rollers— all without shutting the machine down.

So, when cardboard jammed the conveyor again, she did what worked so many times before. Her fingers snapped up the piece of cardboard— but she failed to pull her hand back fast enough or far enough out of the way. When the machine roared back to life, the wheels and gears started spinning along with her hand.

How could this happen to her? She knew what she was doing! She worked accident-free for many years. Just like you drive accident-free for decades or live years without life insurance or have yet to do the homework your teacher never checks. Time passes by without any consequences. Suddenly, something unplanned, unexpected brings life to a crashing halt.

Luke 13:1-9

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

⁶ Then 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. ⁷ 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?’

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

A certain insurance commercial says: “No one plans for an accident.” How true that is! So, do you take the necessary precautions to protect your income, your school-freedom, your health, your life? Do you make sure to do all you can to protect your spiritual life—to ensure no sin spreads its hellish cancer across your very heart?

Many spend their days waiting for another opportunity to know and grow in Jesus. Sometimes it appears like you have so much more time to care about eternity later. Yet, Jesus shakes you to attention. Do not delay! **THE TIME IS NOW!** *to repent, to produce fruit.*

He stresses that very point. Thousands are gushing out just to hear him. So, he raises his voice: “*Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” ([Luke 12:29, 34](#)). “*You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him*” ([12:40](#)). “*I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is completed!*” ([12:50](#)).

God’s plan to release the world from hell’s icy grip—a plan thousands of years in the making—is quickly reaching fulfillment. Jesus has already been born. His baptism marks the beginning of his ministry. Now, in just another year, he would suffer, die, rise again, and enter heaven. The minute he takes his seat at his Father’s right hand means that he can return at any moment.

You stand under that constant reality. Jesus has already entered heaven some 2,000 years ago; you confess in the Apostle’s Creed that he will return to judge the living and the dead. Does that sometimes seem more like a bluff than it does a reality? That Jesus will not spontaneously surprise you with his presence? That you still have time to deal with certain sins later?

The crowds thought so. After all, they were still alive; others were not. There were **[...] Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** With hearts full of love, these Galileans brought animal sacrifices into a sacred part of the temple. The blood spilling from their sacrifice announced their peace with God. In this sacred and vulnerable scene, Pilate’s soldiers barge through closed doors. Swords whip out and sink into bodies. Human life mixed with the perfect things of God!

Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them... Pilate did not send the tower out to murder. By complete accident it crushed innocent bystanders!

Why worry about how they stood before God? They were still alive. As long as nothing bad happened to them, they felt no pressing need to prepare their hearts.

Jesus knows that. “**Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?... [D]o you think [the eighteen] were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?**”

Does God allow suffering in order to pay back wickedness? Did those Galileans skip worship a few too many times? Did those eighteen yell at their kids or abuse their spouses? Is that why they suffered such a pitifully painful death? Did God allow Hurricane Katrina to devastate New Orleans because he hates the shameful ways they use their bodies? Did he let a tidal wave strike Fukushima because he was punishing pagan ancestry worship? Is that why you broke a bone or why your in-laws were in a car accident? Did your pipes freeze, car break down, furnace break because God is angry with something you did? Is that why life at school is so tough right now? Is that why your relationships are

so strained— because you made God angry? Is he repaying you for something you did? Or do you feel like the crowd who stand around Jesus, pointing to the easiness of your life as some sort of sign that you are a better person than others?

By no means! In fact, Jesus never tells you and me why some accidents and disasters happen. Instead, Jesus aims directly at your heart. “...[u]nless you repent, you too will all perish.” By nature some people are not any better than others. By nature, you and I deserve to be struck down, crushed, and condemned as enemies of God. God promises: “The soul who sins is the soul who dies” ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)). “The wages of sin is death” ([Romans 6:23a](#)). If by nature your heart stood right with God, there would be no fear of death— in fact, no such thing as death ever. If hearts remain apart from God, then eternal perishing will result.

So many flocking to Jesus held onto hearts unprepared to meet their Maker. In his loving cry, Jesus stresses **THE TIME IS NOW to repent!** Then 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. 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.’ ”

Tragedies, accidents, disasters— you might never know the “Why?” behind them. The crowds waited for Jesus to release details about the spiritual lives of the victims. Instead, Jesus focuses on something more, something which involves you and me. Are you ready to leave life now? How do you react when tragedy unfolds on television? What thoughts race through your mind when you see a shooting or a natural disaster or a car accident or carbon monoxide poisoning? Yes, you pray for the family’s comfort. You can even help by making donations. Yet, does it ever cross your mind to ask if you are ready to leave this life?

You are ready because of the repentance already worked in your heart. To “repent” means to have “a change of mind.” That you make a 180-degree turn from unbelief to faith. You believe Jesus is your Savior from sin. This is not a choice that you made; you did not say a prayer to invite Jesus into your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. That action cannot be done if you are by nature an enemy of God. The Holy Spirit has brought that change of mind; he has carried faith into your heart ([1 Corinthians 12:3](#)).

Faith comes from hearing the message ([Romans 10:17](#)). In the Bible, you watch a Savior who always cared about the Father’s Word. He made it his habit, the priority in his life to worship. He never challenged the truthfulness of God’s Word; he did not apologize for the things it said; he held to all of it. His words sought the best interests of all people— pointing them to the forgiveness he brings from the cross.

In your place, the Savior is planted into the ground. His life is cut short as if his actions were worthless and his mind scorned the strength from God’s Word. He heard the Father’s command “Remove it!” as he breathes his last breath.

Because his heart beats with an unquenchable love, life is restored. The Father raises his only Son from the dead, giving him new life. He does not plant him in the

vineyard alongside you and me. Instead, he gives Jesus power over the vineyard; he gives Jesus all authority over every single thing!

This is the Savior you have come to love and trust. Through the Word of God, through baptism, your heart receives his life as your own. God's holy desires for you are not strange; instead you embrace them. As someone living with faith, you know **THE TIME IS NOW** to produce fruit!

Apple trees produce apples. They cannot help it. Their roots sink into the ground. Sunlight and water is absorbed. The apple-tree does not work to produce apples; it receives the strength to do what it does naturally.

Christians who love the Word of God cannot help but follow the Word of God. The fruit God looks for is your Christian life at work. So, if your relationship wanders outside of God's desire for marriage and selfless love to a spouse, your love for God and his Word compels you to correct that action. If laziness scorns God's Word, labeling it "old" and "outdated" and "unnecessary," your love for God ignites a renewed interest to hear that Word. If 4-letter words remain a part of your language, love for God drives you to use words God considers pleasing. Your love to keep God's Word pure moves you to defend odd teachings about baptism or the Lord's Supper. Christians eagerly desire the things pleasing to God. God sees these as fruit, as signs of a living and active faith.

Yes, this side of heaven, you will still wrestle with sin. Sometimes it will feel alright to live outside of God's one-flesh union of marriage. You might feel it no crime to question certain portions of the Bible— that creation, the Flood, the trip out of Egypt are too big to believe. You may feel justified to say whatever comes out of your mouth. You can easily adopt that mindset that as long as nothing bad happens to you, then God is not angry.

Holding onto something God calls wrong can lead us to reject the forgiveness which comes from Jesus. It claims that sin is acceptable. Pressed enough, it declares that Jesus is not needed because a pleasant life means that you have done enough to make God happy with you.

That is not what Jesus say! Instead, let your Christian life be one of continual repentance. Not that each day you are shifting from believer to nonbeliever and back to believer. No! Not at all! You already remain a believer. In your Christian life, you continue repenting, turning 180-degree from the sin which attacks your faith. You bask in the assurance that God has forgiven you. You strengthen your heart for a God-pleasing life. **THE TIME IS NOW** to produce fruit.

A certain insurance commercial says: "No one plans for an accident." How true that is! So, you may the necessary precautions to protect your income, your school-freedom, your health, your life. Make sure to make sure no sin spreads its hellish cancer across your very heart.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, you have already come to faith. You love what God says and want to steer away from what does not please God. Yes, you will continue battling the temptation to care about eternity later. Yet, Jesus shakes you to attention. That is not who you are. You are his child, fed by his Word, strengthened by his Word. **THE TIME IS NOW!** to repent, to produce fruit.