

Sermon for March 3, 2013 Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
and the Holy Spirit. Amen

When I was a teenager growing up in Orange County many times I would see and hear people standing on the street corners with bull horns and wearing placards yelling, “**Repent, the day of the Lord is coming.**” Honestly, I never really thought too much of **it or them** for that matter. Because, even though I was a Christian, as a teenager thinking about the end of the world, or thinking about the second coming of Jesus, or thinking about repenting—these were things that were **not** very on high on my priority list at that point in my life. I did understand that repenting for my sins was something that I needed to do **every single day**. I did not understand that at **any time** my life could end—I was just a kid—**nothing** like that was going to happen to me. Right? What did I have to worry about? In my mind, these people were just some “Jesus freaks”, as we used to call them, standing on the corner making a bunch of noise about something that I really **did not want** to hear about.

But, as I got a **bit older** the idea of death, our own mortality, and being judged by God becomes somewhat more real. And as I got a **bit older** I began to realize that death is **not something** that only happens to people of a certain age. For example, last week Toni's daughter, Melinda in Indiana, went to a funeral service for a friend of hers. He was a **23** year old man who died from cancer. Then James Sansom's brother's fiancé died a couple of weeks ago. She was a woman in her **30's** who was killed in a car accident on the freeway on her way home from work one night. And Toni had a friend, only **47** years old, who died recently as well. The words, "**Repent, the day of the Lord is coming.**" can take on a whole new meaning if you think of it in these situations I have just mentioned. The truth is we **never know** the day or the hour we will die and we **never know** the day or the hour we will be standing before God waiting to be judged. It is **not** as my young naïve mind thought—that **repenting can wait**. There does **not** have to be a second coming of Jesus for us to think about what our God in heaven has in store for us. As somber as it sounds; death is only **a heartbeat and a breath** away for us all **no matter** what our age. With that comes God's judgment.

In our gospel lesson for today we heard two **very different** stories about incidents that may have been subjects of recent conversation in Jesus' time. Both stories were about people who died with **seemingly little warning** and for **no**

apparent reason. I would imagine the people who are speaking to Jesus are **trying to make some sense** of these events. Jesus asks them, “Do you think those who died were **worse offenders** or had **greater sins** than anyone else?” I believe it is **human nature** to try to rationalize what happened. **Why** did these things happen to those people? Was it **random**? Was God **punishing** them? When a tragedy happens we want to understand why. Don’t we **do the same thing** today? Don’t we want to know—**why** did my loved one have to die? **Why** did I have to get this disease? **Why** us Lord? **Why** our family? **What** did we do to deserve this? We **try to understand** why ordinary people-like you and me-should have to **bear extraordinary burdens** of grief and pain.

The lesson that Jesus draws from these two unfortunate events is the **necessity for repentance**. Jesus says that those people did **nothing wrong**, they did **nothing to cause** their situation. He indicates that we must **not equate** tragedy with divine punishment. Sin **does not** make these things happen. They just happen. That is all. Life is fragile. **Repent, the day of the Lord is coming.**

It is a **mistake** to put off repentance. It **does not matter** what our age. It **does not matter** what our situation is. **Repentance**, this is what Jesus wanted to talk about. He told them, “Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Repent—but **what does that mean?** Maybe you say-I say, “**I am sorry** for my sins every day. Then the next day I **go out and repeat** the same things I said I was sorry for yesterday.” I know that is **what I do**. But **what does it mean** to repent? How can we **repent and follow** Jesus in the way God wants us to when we keep **committing the same sins** over and over again day after day?

This is the **best definition** of repentance that I have found. It is by spiritual writer Fredrick Buechner. He writes: (quote) “To repent is to **come to your senses**. It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends **less time looking** at the past and saying, “I’m sorry,” than it does looking to the future and saying, “WOW. God is truly a grace filled God.” (end quote) So that is it—we need to **come to our senses** about our beliefs and our relationships with God, about our **priorities** in life, about the things that **draw us from** the love of God. Repentance is about **taking stock** of our lives, **examining** our personal history, **making amends** when necessary, **asking for God’s forgiveness** over and over again. Real repentance calls us to **change** our minds, to turn in some **new direction**, and to enter today and tomorrow with a sense of the **hope, love, and companionship** that God offers to us in our lives. God has something **great in store for us** no matter what our **age**, no matter what our **physical state**. God will be with us and for us in our life. To repent is to

recognize God's love for us. It is to **turn toward the future** in faith, hope, and love for ourselves and others. That is what **Jesus was asking these people** to realize that day. That is what **we are asked to realize as well.**

Next Jesus tells the people a parable about the fig tree in the vineyard that did not produce any fruit. The **owner** of the vineyard wants to cut it down. He has judged this tree is worthless because it is not producing any fruit. Soil in Israel is at a **premium.** This tree is taking up valuable space, consuming valuable nutrients and nourishment. **Get rid of it.** But the gardener asks for **patience** from the owner. Give the tree some **more time.** He will work with it; give it some tender love and care. Fertilize it, and if it bears fruit—great—if not YOU, the owner of the land, can **judge that for yourself** and come to cut it down.

In this parable it is **implied that God** is the owner of the vineyard and **Jesus is the gardener.** **We are the trees** that need the tending, the care, the love, the grace, and the attention. What is also **inferred** from the parable is that God is patient and merciful, which **gives we trees more time** to produce fruit, but there is time a limit. The parable helps **place God's judgment and grace** into a larger perspective. God's grace is greater than God's judgment. Divine patience is simply another **expression of God's grace, mercy, and love** for us all.

So please, I ask us all to **think about our own lives**. I also ask myself these same questions. Is your life **bearing fruit for the good** of the Kingdom of God? How is your **life turning toward** God? How is your **heart and mind being changed**? What **fruits** are you bearing? This is the time for us to **take stock** of our own hearts, souls, and our lives in God.

Here are **5 steps** that I found that will help us turn closer to God. They are:

1. Acknowledge your need for God in your heart and in your life through daily prayer.
2. Confess your sins each day. Tell God about the things that you regret and want to leave behind as you move forward in your walk with Him.
3. Accept God's forgiveness and claim His love as your own.
4. Change your mind. Re-examine some things about your life, your priorities, and your patterns of daily activity.
5. Bear fruit through some new actions, new practices, new patterns and behaviors that reflect the love that God has for you and the love that you have for God.

Repentance is the focus in this Lenten season. **Repent, the day of the Lord is coming.** Repent, change your mind, bear fruit. **God is patient and merciful; each day is a day of grace, providing endless opportunities to bear fruits of repentance.** All thanks be to God. AMEN.

