

Ps 63; Is 55:1-9; 1 Cor 10:1-13; Lu 13:1-9

Third Sunday in Lent 2019

Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem for the last time in this life. He invites us to travel with Him. He walks around teaching and preaching and healing – out on the roads and highways. Today He has been preaching about how the coming of Messiah divides households and is a sign of the end of the age. Then, he tells the crowd, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” That is, the end of the age.

Westerly winds blow off the Mediterranean and carry moisture. Southerly winds blow off the Sinai and carry dry, hot air.

Jesus is not talking about the weather. He is talking about the time of decision – the moment of preparing to meet God. Every human life comes to that exquisite point – hopefully sooner,

but surely at the end of life as we know it-death. After the Lord Jesus tells the crowd that they don't know what time it is – someone speaks up and says, “I know what time it is!” Pilate had his henchmen slaughter some Galileans who came to Jerusalem to make a sacrifice in the temple. Right there, their blood spilled out and mixed with the blood of the lambs that were being sacrificed at the altar. That's the day's headline. In our time it is New Zealand, Pittsburg, Syria or Yemen. We are appalled. Destruction and injustice are all around us.

Jesus doesn't play the game of “ain't it awful!” Instead, Jesus questions conventional Hebrew wisdom that says, “Good people are always blessed. Evil people are always punished.” Jesus says, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.”

We may weep to watch the nightly news – or to listen to the latest headlines on the radio. What can we do about the shocking immorality and cruelty and senseless violence that happens every day? We can only pray. Jesus is saying, “When you hear of sin, look to your own soul.

When you hear of sudden death, call out to God for your own deliverance.” Pray also for others as you yourself repent of your short-comings and your own rebellion against the Creator God. This humble and dependent attitude is pleasing to your Heavenly Father.

Jesus brings up another headline of the day. There was some flaw in the city tower over the public baths at Siloam. The tower tumbled down crushing eighteen innocent people. Tragic. Heartbreaking. Jesus asks, “Do you think they died because they were greater sinners than anybody else in the city? No!” says Jesus. “Rather consider your own frailty – your own offenses against God and others. Jesus calls the disciples, the crowd and us to repent. Loss of life here and now is the least of our worries. Consider *ultimate death* – eternal death – that can overtake the one who must meet God suddenly. Instant tragic death is still a reality of this world.

Hear the truth of Isaiah’s words in what Jesus is telling the crowd and us today, “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” (Is 55:6) Repentance is the most pressing

matter on our calendar – every day we are tested and tempted to pull away from our Savior.

Pulling away is trusting in our own discernment of right and wrong – not trusting God.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of the shenanigans that went on at the foot of Mt. Sinai even while Moses was receiving the Law in God's presence. Aaron said, "Well, I threw everybody's gold jewelry into the furnace, and out came this golden calf." Seriously? The people worshiped the calf. The people said, "Moses hasn't shown up for weeks, guess we're on our own." This is putting the Lord to the test. This is turning away from Jesus and seeking our own way into eternity.

Can we make it to eternity on our own? Jesus (we pray) has transformed our hearts with His love and grace. Jesus calls us to grow in the understanding of what is right according to His Word. Repentance is always in order. We falter when we're on our own. But, when we're faithful to the Lord, we are on the road to glory – His glory, not our own. He seeks only our good. That's why Jesus came.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of what became of the children of Israel. He is speaking to the

church at Corinth, as he retells some of the ways the Israelites pulled away from God – as though God hated them. But God loved them through all their acting up: idolatry, rebellion, grumbling about the food and the lack of water and the hardships of the desert and the lousy leadership. Paul preaches that the way to endure the temptations on the journey is – guess what – turn back to God – repent – ask forgiveness – thank God for the blessings He has given. Paul explains that what God does – what God allows – these things are to strengthen our faith, not to weaken us. God acts in love, not hatred. God acts for good, not evil.

One more story for the road. Then (Jesus) used this illustration: “A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if he could find any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he told his gardener to cut it down. ‘I’ve waited three years and there hasn’t been a single fig!’ he said. ‘Why bother with it any longer? It’s taking up space we can use for something else.’

“‘Give it one more chance,’ the gardener answered. ‘Leave it another year, and I’ll give it

special attention and plenty of fertilizer. If we get figs next year, fine; if not, I'll cut it down.'" (Lu 13:6-8)

The landowner is our heavenly Father, seeking a good harvest -- fruit. The gardener is Jesus. You and I are the fig tree. Listen to this passage of a poem by Mary Oliver (*When I Am Among the Trees*)

*...Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."*

God sent us Jesus out of love. God has not given up on you or me! Christ works only for good, never for evil. Ask God for good fruit in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Depend only on the Lord's provision – you are a branch of the Vine in these days of grace! These days of Lent. Amen.