

### **Sermon on Luke 13:1-9**

As you can tell from today's reading people have been wondering about why bad things happen for a long time. In ancient times it was believed that good things only happened to good people and that bad things only happened to bad people. If you were good—God blessed you; if you were bad—God punished you. But when bad things happened to people who were good; questions started to stir up such as the ones Jesus is asked today. We all know someone or maybe we've even wondered ourselves, if the bad things that have happened are some kind of punishment from God.

Jesus turns their reasoning upside down with his answer. He tells them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." And to drive his point home he tells another story about 18 people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. And then he repeats his first message, "Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." His point—tragedy is not a punishment for sin!

This is good news—sort of; because some tragedy is the result of sin. As we talked last week; when we make bad decisions we don't know when or how they will affect other people. What if the builders of that tower took short cuts to save time and money? Then, like today there are all kinds of bad decisions that contribute to much of the tragedy in the world. But while Jesus still makes a connection between sin and tragedy; he does sever the connection between

tragedy and punishment. “Do you think they were worse sinners than all the others? No. No worse than you are.” Jesus tells them.

That should be good news for us too, shouldn't it? But what Jesus says next should wake all of us up! “But unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Our life here on this earth is fragile. We don't know when or how our end will come. We only know that it will. When the Gospels and Paul's letters were written there was an urgency about them because the early Christians expected Jesus to return at any moment. We today have lost that urgency. It's been over two thousand years and Jesus still hasn't returned. We've become complacent about our faith and its importance in our lives.

Take a look at the parable of the fig tree. Many of us here are farmers and gardeners. When we have plants in our gardens that aren't producing we pull them out. So we can understand when the landowner in the parable finds a fig tree alive and well, but not bearing fruit that he wants to have it dug up. But what's harder to understand is the gardener wanting to tend the tree for one more year.

While it may be a common assumption that the landowner is God and the gardener is Jesus; I like to picture this particularly stubborn gardener who is willing to give this barren fig tree another chance as God. Our God isn't beneath digging around our roots and mixing in manure hoping that we may bear fruit because we have a God who loves us and wants the best for us. And there's no sort-of about that good news!

So after all of this we still don't know why bad things happen to good people. But Jesus can work through these situations to wake us up and invite us to repent. Jesus works through the bad stuff to jar us into realizing that our life is a gift, that our God seeks us out, and that there is so much good that we can do with what time we are given. We don't know how long our lives will be or how they will come to an end, but we do realize that our life is a gift not to be squandered.

God is inviting us to be focused by the headlines of today on the gifts and good works in front of us. God is digging around our roots, fertilizing us in hopes that we will blossom and bear fruit. God loves us enough to hold us accountable for our wrongs and forgives us all our sins as long as our life shall last!