**Luke 13:1-9**

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” **6** And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. **7** 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?’ **8** And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. **9** Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

**“Christ’s Wants No One Axed”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. We all know what it is like to procrastinate in life. In school plenty ignored studying for that test hoping it would go away. Dodging marriage seems convenient now days when there are enough doubts and fears about it. Kids know quite well how to drag their feet, but adults doing this might end up losing their job. Yet, for all the ways we procrastinate and put things on the back burner. When tragedy strikes in this world with suffering and death. No one has any wiggle room. Rather than just being another news story or what to talk about over coffee, there is something more serious to consider.

Lent continues to draw out what none can put off for tomorrow. Cruising past loss and pain denies our most basic need, which is to repent. Jesus shows us today that self-examination uncovers how desperately we each need salvation. If procrastination causes problems, how much more is there danger in delaying repentance? To abuse God’s grace is to try His patience. An attitude of self-righteousness or noticing the wickedness of others always runs the risk of our own failure to repent. This is not to dismiss or overlook injustice and tragedies in the world. Instead, confession is good, since it is all about the gift of forgiveness. The greatest tragedy in life is to miss God’s patience that desires none to perish.

None is to miss how Christ turns all to face the truth of tragedy. There is nothing more disturbing than injustice and that is what the crowd reported to Jesus. They mentioned how Pilate had put to death Galileans in a most irreverent way. The manner of this tragedy made them think it was a sign of punishment from God upon those that had sinned. Yet, Jesus would not let such foolishness stand. His example of a tower in Jerusalem falling on eighteen people by natural disaster was no less distressing. Rather than letting sinners get bogged down in trying to weigh out these tragedies of life. The key theme weaving it all together was Jesus saying, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Tragedy is not about judgment, but a call for all to repentant. The temptation to speculate about certain sufferings and death is often hard to ignore. Yet, there is no certainty why misfortune falls heavier upon one person and not another. This causes struggle over why bad things happen to good people. At the same time, it also fosters a mentality toward others that figures, “They had it coming.” Our nature is to judge accidents, hardships, and disasters in terms of what makes us feel safe. How easy to blame the sufferings of another on their failure, but my success and peace comes from what I do. Tragedy and death should drive us in another direction. Jesus tells us to repent, because all face the reality of death and need saving. Apart from forgiveness we will perish eternally.

None is to miss how Christ seeks for any to rely on the tragic need of His sacrifice. The parable of the fig tree ties repentance directly to God’s patients. Here is an owner of a vineyard who graciously waited three years on a fig tree to produce fruit. Jesus was describing Israel from the Old Testament and their relationship to God. However, the time of judgment had come for the owner said, “Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’” Yet, the appeal by the vinedresser was to give it another year. God’s Son was the overabundant grace who poured out His sacrificial love to an ungrateful people. The outcome of His suffering and death by Father’s judgement held power to bring forth true repentance. To reject or ignore this gift of love by God was to remain fruitless, which meant being cut down. Israel faced such a tragedy years later at the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of a special people.

The axe at the base of the fig tree was more than the Jews. It is set to strike upon a whole sinful world including the visible church. The long-suffering nature of God does not mean He approves of sinners, but has great mercy toward us. No age, people or individual should play around or test this patience. St. Paul tells us, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). Thankfully, this kindness remains by the Gospel given to us in the blood of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice is for everyone in a world of sin, death, and the Devil. Tragedies are to turn us to the cross. The forgiveness of sins is what draws the suffering to the Suffering Savior. To reject and ignore these gifts of His word and Sacrament is to miss His care. In Jesus we have victory, peace, and eternal life beyond the pains of this world.

None is to miss how Christ produces in us fruits of faith able to bear with tragedies. This new life has not come by our works, but what Jesus did for us. He dug around our sinful life with His sacrifice. He put the fertilizer of His resurrection upon us as the promise of salvation. By baptism into Jesus, fruit abounds from the faithfulness of this vinedresser. It can be fruit simply from a good confession like the thief on the cross. Who in his tragic death as a criminal still said, “Jesus, remember me in your kingdom.” It can be fruit coming out of horrid tragedy like when Saul handed Christians over to death. Only to have his life changed by the vinedresser Jesus, so Paul would spread the Gospel unto the Gentiles.

Since God’s Son spares any from the tragedy of eternal death and damnation. The fruit He brings forth for those who trust in Him is rich with life. It means fleeing the ways of wickedness to what God says is good. Instead of talking about misfortunes, we show mercy toward the hurting and despairing. Just as Christ spares all patience with us each day, so this forgiving love goes out toward spouse, neighbor, worker, or stranger. Even when the worst destructions arises, we know the cross of Christ is what we proclaim so none perish. Distancing ourselves from tragedies is not safe, since Christ did the very opposite to save us. The baptized are free by repentance to put tragedy to good use. As St. Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18).

Jesus cuts through the ways we procrastinate with repentance. Death is death regardless of how or when it comes. Lent takes us by repentance to the only salvation for sinners. The loving care of Jesus Christ is to give Himself as a ransom for many. The fact remains there will always be tragedy in life so long as there is sin, death, and the Devil. We can ignore it, blame it on others, hold a grudge against God, or even try to manage it all with insurance, safety protocols, and more technology. Maybe we could make a world where tragedy is only for a select few, but they might actually end up being the most blessed. Since the greatest tragedy in life is to miss God’s patience that desires none to perish. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.