

Third Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2016

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 13:1-9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing 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.'" (NIV)

Do you ever wonder why God does what He does? Have you even been so bold to ask God "why?" Why does God open up the ground and swallow the entire families and possessions of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but not the rest of the Israelites who kept rebelling against Him in their 40 years of wandering? Why did Ananias and Sapphira get struck down immediately for lying about what they gave as an offering, but not Abraham when he lied about Sarah being his sister instead of his wife? Why do believers like Job and poor Lazarus suffer so much, while the rich man who had nothing to do with God was dressed in purple and fine linens and lived in luxury every day? Why did the tornado, or hurricane, or fire ruin those houses and places and not others?

How true it is when the Lord says to Isaiah: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (55). So the thoughts and ways of the Lord at times might leave us wondering and even asking the question why. While the Lord does not owe us an answer to any of our questions let alone all of our questions, today we have a lesson that gives us some insight to what God wants. This is especially true when we witness tragic events. So please listen and learn as Jesus speaks to us so that we might understand better when we begin to wonder and question: **Why would God allow that?**

In the words of our text Jesus addresses two specific tragedies. One is brought up by the people, the other by Jesus. Some present bring up what had happened in the temple to some people who were offering sacrifices to God. Apparently, Pilate gave orders to have some Jews murdered so that their blood was mixed in with the sacrifices they were offering. Why would God allow that? If you were in the temple that day offering your sacrifice and you saw this happen to a bunch of people next to you what would you be thinking? Then Jesus brings up the time the tower in Siloam fell. When it

came crashing down it landed on 18 people and killed them. I'm sure that made for quite a bit of water cooler talk for a while. Why would God allow that? If you had gone out to the pool of Siloam that day and witnessed the tower come crashing down landing on and killing those 18 people what would you think?

Do you know what the people who approached Jesus thought? They wanted to know what these people did. The people in the temple seemed to be God-fearing and all, offering sacrifices to God. But they must have done something really bad to have that happen to them, right? What did they do? Or how about those people crushed under the tower? It had to be more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time don't you think. What sin did they commit to have that happen to them? Job heard the same thing from his "friends" when he suffered. Job, what did you do? Jesus own disciples came to the same conclusion over the man born blind – they wanted to know if it was his parents or this man who sinned to suffer this way.

Do we think the same way? There is a word that I hear get thrown around a lot today, the word - karma. It's like the old saying "*what goes around comes around.*" Do we fall into that line of thinking that good things will happen to good people, and that bad things will happen to bad people? Do we ever witness tragic events and assume those people had it coming? Do we think other people are getting what they deserve? Do we tend to wonder how people have sinned or what they have done when disaster strikes them? Are those the kind of answers we are looking for when we ask the question: Why would God allow that?

Then like the people standing here next to Jesus we need to listen carefully to what our Savior says about all this. ***Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 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? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*** Jesus emphatically makes His point. Did this happen to them because they were worse sinners than others? Did tragedy strike them because they were more guilty than those around them? Jesus says: "No!" He warns unless you repent you too will perish.

Think about what happens when you spot a police car cleverly hiding. You can usually tell by all the people suddenly reducing their speed and tapping the breaks that there is a trooper around. Would you see the police car or even the flashing lights and keep going 15 miles over the speed limit without slowing down? I don't think so. How much more are we to take note and be alert when deadly tragedies take place! Jesus tells us it is time to tap our breaks. It is time to slow down and take notice. It is time to recognize our sins. We are the ones breaking the law not just by speeding, but by every command of God we have broken. Death and tragedy is a reminder of our need to repent. It is not about what others have done and what they deserve but a time to think about what we and our sins deserve. Then we understand a little better why God would allow that – for death is what we all have earned. So when we see these things Jesus tells us to repent - to turn from sin to Him our Savior.

Our Savior now teaches this parable. *“A man had a fig tree growing 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.’”* Jesus doesn’t explain this parable because it is pretty self explanatory. God gives people time. But God expects fruit. God is patient wanting all people to come to repentance. But eventually that patience runs out. God will go the extra mile sending His Son for all people; preaching the Gospel to all people so that they might believe and bear fruit. But if there is no fruit that person in the end will be cut down and thrown into the fire. God tells us up front so that no one has to be left wondering why God would allow that.

The fact is there is something far more astounding than God’s judgment upon sinners. There is something far more astonishing that leaves us asking why God would allow that. The biggest “why” is the one we hear in Lent: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* This is the cry of Jesus from His cross. This is His cry as Jesus suffers for the sins of us all. This is the cry of our Savior who endures hell for us. This is the cry of the Son of God being completely abandoned by the heavenly Father. Jesus knows the answer to His question “why.” Jesus knows why God allowed that. It is so that our sins could be paid and our salvation could be secured. It was so that a door for repentance and forgiveness could be opened for us. It was so we no longer have to fear death and so we could forever rejoice in His victory over the grave. Listen again this Lent to how much Jesus suffered. See how He was crucified and died. Ask why God would allow all that. Then hear God tell you why in His Word. It is because that is how much He loves you!

There are many things in this sinful world that leave us wondering why God does the things He does. Many times we might want to ask: “why?” But nothing makes us ask *“why would God allow that”* more than the things God in grace does for you and me. Why would God kill His Son so that we might live? Why would God continue to give me, a sinner, more time here on earth when others die? It is only by grace – a time of grace in fact. That is a person’s lifetime. It is the time we have to repent. It is the time we have to know and learn about our Savior. It is the time we have to grow in faith and to serve and live for Jesus. It the time we have to love Him who first loved us. It the time we have to tell others the good news and call them to repentance. It is our time right now to bear fruit. Why would God allow that? I pray after this lesson you understand better the answer every time you ask this question. Amen.

