

## **“DIGGING AROUND THE ROOTS: GOD’S GRACE IN A FALLEN WORLD”**

**Lk 13:1-9, Ezek 33:7-20, & 1 Cor 10:1-13**

Picture this: God’s people, in God’s house offering their gifts in devotion in the temple. They weren’t causing trouble or harming anyone. And then, without warning, Pilate’s soldiers descended.

They were given no warning, or a chance to flee. Cut down in cold blood. Their blood, mingled with the blood of the very sacrifices they offered! It was a day of profound grief for every faithful Jew.

Consider the human cost. Wives who journeyed to Jerusalem, returned as widows. Children, their hands reaching for fathers, found themselves orphaned. A community shattered. What a harsh reminder of the brokenness of our world... where even those seeking God’s favor are met with violence and injustice.

And so, they brought their grief, their outrage, to Jesus. “Why, Lord? Why this senseless violence?”

Perhaps, they hoped for Jesus to echo their own righteous anger... To condemn Pilate, to denounce the brutal Roman oppression. **“How long, O Lord? Hear the cries of your people and crush these wicked Romans!”**

But, perhaps there was a deeper longing... for comfort, for sympathy. They needed to know that even in the face of such horror, God was still with them. They wanted Jesus to stand with them, as they looked for a human response to an inhumane act.

And then... Jesus speaks. But His words aren’t what they expected. Not comfort, not condemnation of Pilate, not a rallying cry against Rome.

The sheer audacity of His statement! “After all we’ve endured, Jesus? After all the suffering...” “How dare you inflict more pain, more wounds, with your criticism? To tell us to repent? What about Pilate? What about the Romans? Tell them to repent! They’re the ones who shed innocent blood!”

This wasn’t the answer they wanted. But in the midst of their grief, in the face of such injustice, Jesus calls them to look inward. He calls them to **repentance**.

***And so I say, “Repent, or you will likewise perish.”*** Consider the tower of Siloam. Those eighteen people crushed when it fell – were they worse sinners than you? Was Pilate a worse sinner than you? Were those slaughtered in the temple worse sinners than you?

Do you believe you’re innocent? Blameless before God? No. The truth is, you are **all** stained with sin. You all fall short of God’s glory. You are all in need of repentance. So I say again, ***repent, lest you likewise perish***. Don’t focus on the sins of others, but look to your own heart.

Jesus’ words seem cold, even callous. Imagine uttering those very words today following a terror attack or loss of life due to what insurance companies would call **“acts of God.”** ***“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”***

We can almost hear the immediate backlash. “How dare you! After all we’ve suffered, after all the innocent lives lost, you tell them to repent!”

We want to point the finger elsewhere. We want to say, “It’s *their* fault, not mine.” But Jesus, refuses to let us off the hook. He forces us to confront the truth: **the need for repentance is universal, and that it begins with us.**

Do you believe those who suffer such tragedies are worse sinners than you? Do you believe you're spared because you're somehow more righteous? Are you so self-assured that you claim God punishes them for their sins, while you remain untouched, deemed worthy of protection?

This isn't how God's justice works. Suffering isn't a simple equation of sin and punishment. The world is broken, and so are we! All subject to the consequences of a fallen world. So, look inward. **Repent, lest you likewise perish.** Don't presume to know God's judgment on others, but examine your own heart. Because the call to repentance is not for "them," it is for you.

To say that all have sinned and are in need of repentance, is dangerous. Just ask any of the prophets.

Yet, Jesus wants us to understand that we're fallen and sinful people, living in a fallen and sinful world. And these tragedies, touch us all—the good and the bad, the rich and the poor, the young and the old. Because **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** If you're afflicted, it doesn't mean you are worse. If you're spared, it does not mean you're better. **"All"** means all.

So, what happens when suddenly or slowly, through old age or tragedy, our lives are taken? There's a much greater disaster awaiting those who fall short of God's glory. Eternal separation from God—the ultimate consequence of our sin. This is the truth that Lent forces us to confront, and that Jesus, in His love, compels us to accept this morning.

We love to play judge, to think we have it all figured out... but these self-serving judgments, are unreliable, and often false—at best, a comforting illusion.

Instead, in times of suffering and uncertainty, we turn to Jesus. We repent. We take refuge in Him. Because He alone, can deliver us not only from the brokenness of this fallen world, but also from the brokenness within ourselves... and offer true and lasting salvation.

Consider Jesus' parable of the fruitless fig tree. That tree is a reflection of our own state as sinners, those who **fall short of God's glory.**

And it's not merely a matter of lacking enough good fruit, because on our own we have no fruit at all that truly pleases God! What we deserve is to be cut down and be removed from the vineyard.

But there's One who pleads for mercy on our behalf. He asks that we be spared, that we be **"let alone,"** or, that we **"be forgiven"** for our unfruitfulness. He asks that we be given extra care, that we be nurtured and tended, that we might, by His grace, live and finally bear fruit. This is the heart of the Gospel. Not our own effort, but God's merciful mediation. Not our deserving, but His undeserved love.

**Note well:** this mercy, and this grace, is given in spite of the tree. It's not that the fig tree shows any natural promise, any glimmer of potential. In itself, it's absolutely barren.

This mercy comes entirely apart from the tree. It's outside of us—**extra nos.** It's an act of pure grace, a gift of undeserved mercy from the vinedresser, who becomes, in reality, its Savior. This is the beauty and power of the Gospel. It's not about what we bring, but about what God gives. It's not about our worthiness, but about His steadfast love.

This is a passionate picture of the care Jesus offers us. He digs around in the soil of our lives, even in the messiest, most unproductive parts. He's the one who comes to nourish us.

And what is this nourishment? It's Himself!—His very Body and Blood. Because Jesus, in His boundless love, became the one rejected, the one discarded. He was hung on the cross, on that garbage heap called Golgotha, His blood poured out for us.

But from that seemingly desolate place, from the tree of the cross, comes the fruit of salvation. This fruit, His Body and Blood, is the food and drink we need to produce the fruits of faith. To transform us from barren, unfruitful trees into trees overflowing with the love and forgiveness of our Savior. We're no longer defined by our lack, but by His abundance... no longer bound by our sin, but freed by His grace.

So, when we're confronted with tragedy, when our mortality looms large, when fearsome things shake the world, or even when the daily annoyances and challenges tempt us to judge, criticize, or wallow in self-pity... what then?

We turn to the One who is our refuge and we repent. Because to repent is not only to acknowledge our sin but to actively take refuge in Him who promised to be our help and our strength in times of trouble. It's to find our life and our assurance in Him alone.

It's to release our grip on the people and things of this fleeting world, which, sooner or later, will fail us... and place our eternal hope, in the One who will never, ever let us down.

And so, when disasters strike, when we're shaken to our core, when we feel completely vulnerable, it a harsh reminder that maybe we've been placing our trust in the wrong things and building our lives on shifting sands.

In those moments, we need to repent and turn again to our true hope in Christ alone and heed the words of St. Paul: ***"Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."***

It's not really a question of ***if*** we'll fall, but when. When the storms of life rage, when the foundations of our world tremble, where will we find our footing? Will it be on the solid rock of Christ, or on the crumbling illusions we have built for ourselves? Let's choose wisely. Let's choose Him.

And so, when we fall – whether we're knocked down by the sin of others, by the tragedies that plague creation, or felled by the sin within us – we don't despair. We turn to the Lord in repentance, and remember our baptism!

We aren't baptized into Moses, as Paul wrote of Israel in our Epistle, but into Christ! The One greater than Moses, the One who offers a greater exodus through His death and resurrection. Here Christ has delivered us from our slavery, not to Egypt, but to sin... and given us the promise, of eternal life.

We're baptized into Christ! And that baptism is a living reality, fed by the bread of His own Body, satisfied with the drink of His own Blood, and sustained by His unending forgiveness.

And this baptism, our connection to Christ, holds true when our lives are going smoothly AND when our world is shaken to its core. In Christ, we're secure. We're forgiven. We're eternally His.

When things are going well, it is a gift from our gracious Lord's hand. And when things are not going so well, our Lord is with us, walking alongside us through it.

The constant truth is the constant goodness of the Lord... to know that whether we live or die – whether Pilate spills our blood or not, whether natural disasters and disease strike, whether sorrow or

joy or challenge is our daily bread – to know that, in all things, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

***“For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.”***

This is our anchor and hope—the unwavering promise that sustains us in every season of life. We belong to Him. And in Him, we find our peace, our strength, and our eternal security.

And so, we repent. We look to Him, we rely on Him, and we expect good from Him.

This is the opposite of grumbling and complaining, of dwelling in negativity and despair, because to repent is the ultimate act of praise. When we repent, we confess the One who's promised to forgive, and sealed that promise in His own precious blood.

To both speak and to live a life of repentance and forgiveness is to truly praise His name. Because that's how He wants to be known: as the God of the cross. The God of forgiveness.

The God who got down on His hands and knees with us, in our dirt and brokenness, that we might stand with Him in His glory. That's a God worth trusting. That's a God worth following. That's a God worth surrendering to. So let's, repent, and live in the glorious freedom of His forgiveness. In the name of Jesus, Amen.