

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday in Lent/Year C
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Text: Luke 13:1-9

“Breaking News: Mayhem in the Temple! What about in your life?”

Jesus and his disciples continue to make their way toward Jerusalem on this Third Sunday in Lent. All throughout the 12th chapter in Luke's gospel Jesus had been speaking to his disciples and the crowd about the present and future coming of God's kingdom and the times in which they were living. Like the prophets of old Jesus reminded all who were listening that it was imperative that everyone repent of their sins and turn back to God or face judgement.

Today as he was speaking there developed a buzz in the air. ‘Breaking News Flash: ‘There has been mayhem in the Temple!’ Pilate had had group of Galileans slaughtered by his soldiers as they were gathering to make sacrifice to God in the Temple. Most knew that they were not liked by Pilate. And Galileans with their rebellious ways and public outbursts, had long been the bane of Pilate's power and that of Rome. No one knew what they did to provoke Pilate this time. They only knew that Pilate had them slaughtered where they stood on holy ground and that their blood mixed with the blood of sacrifices.

Jesus' response was indeed, curious. He offered no words of compassion or pity. Instead he asked 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."* Was he not the least bit distraught over their deaths? Was he not concerned that a neighbor or friend from Galilee had been among them? Wasn't there more he could have said than that?

In the next breath, Jesus brought up the incident at the tower overlooking the Pool of Siloam. Eighteen bystanders were killed when the tower suddenly fell and crushed them. And what Jesus said regarding their deaths was also curious: *"Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--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 just as they did."*

Again, were there to be no tears shed for them? No comforting answers? No uproar or protests?

Certainly those Galileans would not be the last recipients of Pilate's wrath. And structures, like towers and buildings and bridges, will eventually crumble and fall-sometimes on poor unsuspecting souls. Things happen. Life happens.

Fast forward to today. Turn on the television. The radio. In fact, turn to any form of media and some days there is more reported than we can handle. Shootings at mosques-50 people killed. Cruise ship evacuations. Airplane crashes. School bus driver torches bus. Floods, cyclones, earthquakes, hurricanes. Hunger. Suicides. Disease. Each tragedy capable of taking lives, altering lives. Families, friends, towns, countries, survivors, all left to grieve, to pick up the pieces, to carry on. Then and now we are all asking the same questions: 'Why? Why did this have to happen? What did he do? What did she do? What did they do? What did I do? What has anyone done to deserve such terrible outcomes? It isn't fair!'

In Jesus' day, there was no question as to why bad things happened to people. Going way, way back the theology of the day was that good things happened to good people and bad things happened to bad people because of a person's sinfulness. You were blind because you sinned. You contracted leprosy because you sinned. You lost your house, your farm, your animals because you sinned. Tragedy struck. Why? Because you sinned! And if it were not you who sinned, someone in your family did! Keep your nose clean and all will be right in your world.

But Jesus puts the breaks on all of this kind of thinking. *"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? "Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No! And NO! Jesus said. Bad things can and do happen but God doesn't work that way. The reality is that good things happen to both good and bad people. The reality is bad things happen to both good and bad people. Tyrants, towers, and God show no partiality. But YOU- take care of your business! "Unless you repent you all perish as they did!"*

Sisters and brothers, there is urgency in the words of Jesus this morning. Now, TODAY, is the time to examine our lives. Today is the day that you and I have been given to turn our hearts and minds around, to rethink and to re-orient our lives-not out of fear of divine retribution but because we are given this one life to live and it is holy and short and precious. In the gospel Jesus is more concerned with why people do not fully live with God being their sole provider and strength. He was not interested in explaining the actions of tyrants or why towers suddenly

fall or the length of days one lives be you saint or sinner. The Jesus of this gospel was and is more concerned about God's children drawing closer to God and becoming the people God means for God's children to be, becoming who we long to be.

The late poet, Mary Oliver, wrote in the last lines of her beautiful poem "The Summer Day":

*Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?"*

At the heart of her question echo's Jesus' call to repentance. For each one to turn our lives around. The world is going to keep on turning. Life is going to happen and there are and will be things happening beyond our control. There is no escape from death. There is no promise of tomorrow. So what will we do with our "one wild and precious life?"

Jesus tells the story about a man and his fig tree planted in his vineyard. The man was ready to chop it down because after three years it hadn't produced any fruit. Not one fig. Yet his gardener insisted that the tree not be taken down but given one more chance, one more year. He was willing to do whatever it took to nurture that fig tree in order that it would bear fruit. Jesus didn't say what happened next to the fig tree. Still the message was clear-bear fruit or be dead.

The gardener is like our God who shows mercy again and again and gives us chance after chance to grow closer to him. *This is the day* that God has made for us, for you and me so that we can experience life in abundance. John 3:16 reads: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" What will we do with our one wild and precious life this day?

Someone in our bible study suggested that we too are that gardener. We certainly have been given the opportunity to work the soil, to dig at our hearts. And we've the good stuff- every opportunity, every grace and every mercy to cultivate and grow our faith, our hope, our strength, our trust in God so that in turn we might bear good fruit in the world; telling others about God, sharing the Good News, and showing others the face and the love of Jesus.

What will we do with our one wild and precious life today?

Well, that is up to each person but Jesus says do not put it off. Do not wait!
There is no day promised but today. Amen.