**Sermon Lent 3C – Luke 13:1-9 – 20 March 2022**

**Video Link:** [**https://youtu.be/gg19uIemTX8**](https://youtu.be/gg19uIemTX8)

Why do bad things happen to certain people? Why does one person slide down an embankment hit her head on a wall and end up brain dead while her friend who is sliding down with her walks away without a scratch? Why do some people end up the victims of violence and others never experience any real violence their whole life? Why do bad things happen to some people and not to others? This is an age-old question. People ask it today and people were asking Jesus about it almost two thousand years ago. Even in the Old Testament, there is a whole book dedicated to a man called Job who lost everything, his property, his children, and his health.

Some people think that when bad things happen it is God handing out punishment. Sometimes there is a direct cause and effect between behaviour and bad consequences, like smoking and lung cancer, or drink-driving and car accidents. The Roman governor Pilate had killed some people while they were worshipping in Galilee and about eighteen other people died when a tower fell on them in Jerusalem. What had these people done to deserve death? Were these people worse sinners than anyone else because of what happened to them? Had God singled them out for their sins?

After all, if they were worse sinners, then at some level they deserved what they got. We could judge them for being bad and be satisfied that justice has been served. We want bad people to get what they deserve, don’t we? Not necessarily death but at the very least something that will teach them a lesson. Let’s admit it, we even fantasize about it, don’t we? In our fantasies the bullies always get what they deserve, don’t they? Deep down we want God to pour out his wrath on the people that hurt us.

The problem is that often people suffer tragedy even death and they aren’t any worse than anyone else. Sometimes they can even be people whom we would consider to be very good. Jesus says that the people who were killed by Herod and those killed by the tower were not worse sinners at all. In effect, he is saying that they were no worse than the people he was talking to. They were no worse than the disciples and they were no worse than us.

It would have been hard for those listening to Jesus to hear what he said because the common wisdom was that if you lived a good life you would be guaranteed blessing and long life. In our hearts and minds, many of us are tempted to think like this. We are tempted to think, “If I lived a good life… If I built up enough credits with God… If I did something really important with my life, God will look upon me with extra favour and protect me from tragedy and death.” I remember when I was 15, waking up one night when my father came home from visiting mum at the hospital. He was crying bitterly, even though an agnostic at the time, he was praying to God, offering to do anything, even start going to church if only God would let her live and not let cancer kill her. She wasn’t a bad person, but she still died at 35 years of age. How can death be so random and meaningless? Surely there is some way we can escape death.

He says two times “unless you repent you too will perish” (vs 3,5). The truth is that we are all heading for death because we are all sinners. “We upset other people, we want things our own way. Instead of bearing the fruit of love in our lives, far too often we bear the fruit of envy, pride, selfishness and even anger. We say we trust in Jesus but often our lives don’t reflect that trust. Like the apostle Paul far too often we do not do the good we want to do. We are sinners and sin always leads to death.

We need to repent because there is only one thing worse than death and that is dying without faith in God. Everyone dies but for those who turn to Christ death does not have the final say. When my mother died the pastor who was doing the funeral came to our place. I am sure he said many things but the only thing I remember was this, “I visited her in the hospital and spoke to her, and I am convinced that she died having faith in God.” My father’s bargain with God did not save my mother but Jesus did. She died with faith in Christ and as Jesus said to Martha just before raising Lazarus, *‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26and whoever lives by believing in me will never die’* (John 11:25,26). My mother’s death was not final and one day we will meet again.

Since through Christ death has been defeated, we no longer need to fear death and we can live life to the full. Jesus encourages us to repent and receive victory over death through him. Then we can make the most of whatever time we have by living fruitful lives of love for God and our neighbours. These are the important things, repentance, victory over sin, death and the devil, and fruitful lives.

The problem is that even once we repent, we are continually tempted to turn away from God as our source of all good things. We soon discover that repentance is not a once-off event but rather something that needs to be repeated day after day. The good news is that God does not easily give up on people. Like a gardener that keeps on fertilising a tree and asking for the owner to give it one more year, Jesus keeps on looking out for us. Fertilising our hearts and minds with his word and his body and blood. Jesus speaks up for us and instead of giving us what we deserve God keeps on giving us chances. He is patient with us as he waits for us to change. He gives us chance after chance to repent and turn to Jesus. Jesus even pays the price for all of our sins so that instead of being punished we receive forgiveness, again and again, and again.

Every single one of us will die, but those who believe in Christ will live even though they die. Therefore, we do not need to worry about death, but instead, live the life we now have secure in Christ. A full life of love toward God and our neighbours. Through Christ, our death becomes nothing more than our final sleep and when we awake, we will find that God our Father has not forgotten us but instead, Jesus has prepared a place for us to feast with him forever.

Amen

*Pastor Rolf Lungwitz*