

March 7, 2010 Luke 13:1-7

Imagine you're driving on a long trip. Your eyes are heavy. Your head bobs. You start to drift across the center line into on-coming traffic. Your passenger yells, "Wake up!" Would you complain, "Oh let me sleep!" Of course not! That cry will save your life!

In our reading, Jesus yells, "Wake up!" "Unless you repent, you too will all perish!" Will we complain, "Jesus, just let me sleep"? His words, harsh though they sound, are words of love to rescue our souls from hell! So Christian, **Heed Christ's call to repent!**

Some people reported that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had sent soldiers into the Temple to execute some Galileans worshipping there. They then desecrated their offerings by mingling their human blood with the sacrifices. The people apparently concluded, "The Galileans must have really done something bad for God to allow them to suffer such a violent death!"

How did Jesus view it? **"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!"** All people are sinful. All people will die. All people need to repent of their sins or a worse fate than death, namely damnation in hell, will be theirs.

Day after day we hear of violent deaths due to natural disasters, war and crime. Terrible accidents cripple people for life. Sudden illness unexpectedly strikes. Are you tempted to assume, "They must have done something terrible for God to allow that disaster"? "Unless you repent, you will all perish," warns our Savior. He bluntly and honestly tells us we are all guilty and we all deserve God's judgment for time and for eternity. The question to ask is not, "What did they do that was so sinful" but rather, "What have I deserved by my sin?" We may not have murdered someone, committed adultery, robbed anyone at gunpoint, or committed other gross, publicly shameful sins. However when the spotlight of God's Law penetrates the deepest secrets and cravings of our hearts or when we neglect or refuse to do the things which God has commanded us to do, we face the horrible reality, "Our sins deserve God's just judgment and punishment." His word rings true: **"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins"** (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Therefore, heed Christ's call to repent! What does it mean to repent? It literally means to change your mind. Don't think sin is funny or somehow pleasurable. Don't toy with it, try it out, or continue to live in it. Be sorry you are a sinner! Our sins violate the perfect, loving will of the holy God. Of course He is angry! His Law crushes our hearts, for we cannot escape God's punishment despite anything we may try to do to make up for our sins. "Lord, have mercy," we plead.

"Repent" also means to trust that God in mercy has rescued us from hell's punishment. Because He loves you He sent His only-begotten Son into this sinful world. Jesus made up for all our sin by being perfect for us. Jesus paid the enormous debt of all our sin when He sacrificed Himself on the cross under God's curse. God has forgiven you, declaring you righteous in His sight for Jesus' sake! Thank God for giving you the gift of faith in Jesus! Your faith is like a hand receiving the gift of righteousness and forgiveness God offers. It's yours! Don't drag the burden of sin, guilt and shame throughout your life. By faith in Jesus you are at peace with God! Live in joy and hope. Live each day in repentant faith!

In our lesson Jesus now tells a parable to demonstrate how our faith in Him will show in the way we live. He describes a man who had a fig tree. Every day for three years he went to look for fruit on it, but he did not find any. Finally he told the caretaker, "Cut it down." The caretaker answered, "Give it one more year. I'll dig around it and fertilize it. Then if it doesn't bear fruit cut it down." Why

had the man planted the fig tree in the first place? He expected it to bear fruit, of course. But if it drew on the moisture and fertility of the ground without giving anything back, it finally deserved to be cut down.

How does the parable apply to us? A living tree will produce fruit. A living faith will produce good works. God expects His children to show their faith in their daily lives as they live in love for Him. What if God sees no good works done in faith? Jesus, like the caretaker in the parable, pleads for us in heaven. God is patient, but His patience with those who refuse to repent and bring forth the fruits of faith will ultimately end. Judgment will come, even for those who claimed to be Christians and members of a church if they really don't repent of their sin and believe in Jesus. Justice must be served.

God has been especially gracious to us. He has given us His precious Word and His blessed Sacraments. Our church body has some of the most vigorous Bible training available for our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers who serve our churches and schools. We have so many opportunities for Bible study for all ages in formal classes in church and school, in Bible Information classes, and for confirmation classes. We have such rich, Bible-based home Bible reading material through our synod's publishing house. In all these ways with His Law God digs into our hearts, breaking up the hard clots of self-righteousness and sinful stubbornness. With the Gospel He fertilizes and waters our faith, sinking our roots deeply into His love and forgiveness through Jesus. Now He simply asks, "Where is my fruit?"

"Lord, here's some fruit. By your Spirit's power I believe in you. I love you. Since I am going to heaven because of Jesus, who lived, died, and rose for me, I'll patiently endure trial. I'll deny myself to serve you! Lord, here's more fruit - I'm thankful to use what you give me and the opportunities you give me to spread the Gospel in my family, home town, and throughout the world through our missions. Lord, here's more fruit. I long to worship you. I can hardly wait for Sunday since in worship and Bible study your Spirit causes me to grow through your Word and Sacrament! When in worship I confess my sin, I really mean it. When you forgive me, I rejoice and use the chants and hymns to express my praise and thanksgiving. Here's more fruit - I'm not just playing with Christianity for a period of time to gain some earthly benefit for my family or myself, and then when I don't think I need your church anymore, I'm out of here. I'm here for the long haul I need you throughout my life to give me faith through your Word and Sacrament. I'm here for the long haul to encourage others and ensure your gospel is here for the next generation. Here's more fruit, Lord, whenever I'm like the tree that's just using up the soil and producing nothing for you, give me the honest ability to confess my sins, give me the humble faith to receive your forgiveness, and Lord, give me the desire and ability to make my life count for your glory and praise."

Don't you have mixed emotions when you learn the parable of the fruitless fig tree? We realize the dreadful fact that God's patience has an end. At the same time we rejoice in knowing that God forgives us and will continue to patiently grant us time on this earth to grow in faith and to serve Him in thanks. Oh, by the way, what better way to thank Him than by being like the servant who nurtures the faith of people you know who are neglecting their Savior and are in danger of facing God's judgment? Jesus tells us to wake up because He loves us. Let's tell others to wake up too, before it's too late. Christian, heed Christ's call to repent. Live each day in repentant faith, bearing the fruits of faith. Amen.