

Sermon Luke 13 1 9 3rd Sunday in Lent Series C

Sermon: 3rd Sunday in Lent

Text: Luke 13: 1 – 9

Theme: Repent or perish

Goal: Looking to the history (facts), let us examine ourselves.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When I begin to prepare a sermon, I always have concerns when the text presents harsh Law: Maybe someone will be offended by the strong Law? Does this specific Law apply to our people nowadays and to St. Thomas? Will people be touched deeply by this Law, turning in repentance? Or will this specific Law block and stubborn some?

On the other hand, I know that we are not that perfect as we wish, and that we all need the Law. I cannot preach only amenities all the time, things that people like to hear. The Word of God always consists of Law and Gospel: the call to repentance showing what is wrong; and the announcement of forgiveness to all who repent and believe in Christ.

Struggling with these issues, and trying to get a good balance between Law and Gospel, being faithful to the text, I let the text preach to myself first. What is God saying to me? After that I can ask myself: What do I have to share with my people?

Lent is a specific time of mourning about our sins, which caused the death of Jesus on the cross. He died on our behalf, to free us from the temporal penalties we deserve and from eternal damnation. Several texts in this Season show God calling to repentance. And this is the case of the readings for today. May God touch our hearts deeply.

I – The facts

When there's a big tragedy in our country (or in the world) there are always those who ask WHERE WAS GOD?? People try to keep him out of their lives, holding Him at bay, having no room for Him and then ask in an accusing manner- WHERE IS GOD?? (R.Rahn).

Two big tragedies had happened in Jesus time: The governor Pontius Pilate had killed some Galileans while they were offering their sacrifices in the temple, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices; and a tower had fallen at the pool of Siloam, killing 18 people.

We are surrounded by tragedies every day. Just to mention two: a hot-air balloon caught fire in Luxor, Egypt, last week. Nineteen tourists died when the balloon crashed on the ground. – A night club was holding a party for university students in a city close to where we come in South Brazil. More than one thousand students were there. Fire broke out, and 239 people died. Our pastors in the city and the Chaplain of the Lutheran University gave strong assistance to the families. Three Lutherans also died.

Questions and more questions rise in our hearts when we face tragedies in the family and around us. Jesus' answer in these cases is: Do you think that those people who died in tragedies were worse sinners than all the others because they suffered this way? Do you think that they were more guilty than all the others? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish. – Jesus uses the opportunity for calling everyone to repentance who survives the tragedy.

We are not judges. Although some tragedies are the result of lack of security, lack of attention or technical problems, they cannot be seen

as a particular punishment upon some people. They are a call to reflect about the brevity of our lives: And if it happens to us? Are we ready to leave this life? Therefore Jesus calls to repentance. Life is short.

II – A time of grace

As long as we are alive, we live in the time of God's grace. For how long? No one knows. The parable of the fig tree planted in a vineyard shows God's patience. The vineyard is God's Kingdom. The fig tree is each of us. The owner is God. The vinedresser is Jesus. – We were planted in God's Kingdom by His love and grace. God looks for fruits of faith in our lives. Even if He doesn't find any fruit and orders to cut down the tree, Jesus interferes and asks for one more year. He will take care in a very special way of the tree. But if the tree doesn't produce fruit after a year??? It will be cut down! John the Baptist had preached in a similar way: "The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).

This teaching calls us to examine our lives according to the Ten Commandments. Are we producing fruits to nurture others? Are the fruits glorifying our Father in heaven? We have abundance of water and fertilizers that our vinedresser offers us: His Word and the Sacraments. We cannot blame God that he doesn't give us conditions to produce fruits. We are responsible for our lives before God.

III – Our responsibility toward others

But, at the same time, we are responsible for others as well, as the Old Testament reading from Ezekiel warns us about our task as watchmen. The Minister of the Word has a special responsibility to

call people who are going astray back to the right path, and to alert them about the imminence of judgment. This is the hard side of the Law. But on the other hand, we heard that God “takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?” This is the call of grace that comes out from the depth of God’s hearth. We pray for those who are going astray from the faith and from the fellowship of the Christian family; we pray for those who have never believed; we give testimony about our faith in Jesus in words and deeds, making all efforts to avoid someone of our relationship to be condemned. But at the end, each of us will be accountable for our own acts.

The Epistle reading (1 Corinthians 10:6) warns us that “these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did”. It refers to the several times when the Israelites were rebelling against God in the Old Testament time. Those are not just stories, but we have to learn from them, repent and believe in God’s mercy and grace in Jesus.

Conclusion: The Psalm (85) for today has a very special message of comfort: “You showed favour to your land, o Lord... You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered their sins. You set aside all your wrath... Restore us again, O God our Saviour... Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us salvation... Surely his salvation is near those who fear him...” This is our faith and we rely on God’s faithful promises in Christ, living a godly life with daily repentance, confessing: “I do believe, Lord. Help me overcome my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24) Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
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