

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday in Lent, March 12, 2023**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 598:1-4, 358:1-3, 325, 392, 145.

Lessons: Isaiah 5:1-7, 2 Peter 3:1-16, Passion History Part 3

Sermon Text: Luke 13:1-9.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

NOTE: The Passion History is found on the LCCF website on the WEEKLY SERMON page.  
<http://www.lutheranlccf.org/MinistrybyMail.html>

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The world is clearly and quickly moving toward God's final judgment. Yet so many fail to reckon with this fact. They are like the rich man Jesus talked about in a parable in the previous chapter. That rich man was busy making money and unconcerned about the idea of his death. He was a fool.

As we see Jesus talking about death, especially sudden death, we ask today

**ARE YOU PREPARED FOR DEATH?**

1. *“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*
2. **Jesus uses examples of people who died unexpectedly and makes the application: Were they prepared to die?**
3. **He then warns us with the parable of fig tree.**

Jesus makes it very clear that unless you repent, you aren't prepared to die. Without repentance, eternal damnation in hell is the result.

Daily contrition and repentance are part of the life of the Christian. You recognize this when you say “I'm sorry” for what you do wrong and get the response “I forgive you.”

The people of Jesus' time generally believed that persons who were struck by disaster were being punished by God because of their sin. We cannot say exactly why some people talked to Jesus about the Galileans who had been murdered by Pilate, but that could be one reason why these people told Jesus. We know nothing more about this event from Scripture.

But Jesus rejected this false idea. He warned the people who brought this report that they themselves would perish unless they repented. Those Galileans were not greater sinners than they were.

The Galileans had died terrible deaths that were unexpected, and happened even while they were going about their religious duties offering sacrifices to God.

He asks, *“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.”*

Jesus correctly interprets the event the people give him and gives them another example of people who died unexpectedly. He speaks of a tower which had collapsed and killed 18 people near the pool of Siloam which is in the southeast corner of Jerusalem. He asks *“do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

Jesus breaks the connection between these tragic deaths and punishment for sin. He provides the proper interpretation of these two events: *“unless you repent, you too will all perish.”* Brutal murders, shocking accidents, death in whatever form, all are reminders of God's law: *“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”* Ezekiel 18:4 (NIV)

Death is one way God calls people who are still alive to repentance lest they perish eternally. We see unexpected examples every day, whether it is war in another country, someone dying suddenly from disease or something such as an automobile accident. Some people falsely conclude that if nothing really bad happens to them in life, it is a sign that they have been living good lives. Jesus is teaching that not only certain very wicked people need to repent, but that repentance is necessary for everyone.

We must not interpret unusual earthly suffering and death as a specific punishment for some sin which an individual has committed, unless there is proof. We are to recognize that whatever calamity happens to others could just as easily happen to us.

Repentance is one of those words in the Bible which is used in a narrow sense and in a broad sense, which grows out of the narrow sense.

In the narrow sense, repentance means to be sincerely sorry for our sins. That is shown, for example, by the way in which we confess our sins before we approach the Lord's Table to receive the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins in the Lord's Supper.

In the broad, or wider sense, repentance means first of all, sincere sorrow over our sins. It includes secondly, faith in the forgiveness of sins, that is, faith that Jesus forgives our sins out of love, and thirdly, seeking daily to abstain from the sin and to change or amend our sinful lives. We also see discussion of repentance in the words of Martin Luther when he talks about baptism; that our new man, our "new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever".

Not doing the sinful activity is part of repentance. And that concept of amending our sinful lives is present every time we say "I'm sorry". We – that is, the children of God – don't say "I'm sorry" and then plan to do the bad thing again.

We are mindful of God forgiving our sins whenever we say to another human being "I forgive you".

Jesus' twice-repeated warning "***unless you repent, you too will all perish***" isn't the end of his message on this day. He then tells a parable about a fig tree that does not bear fruit.

God gives time for repentance – just as you have such time for repentance at this very moment. You are still alive right now. But we also know that our time for repentance will come to an end.

We see this in Abraham pleading that God not destroy the huge city of Sodom for the sake of 50 righteous people living there. Abraham pleads God down to 10 righteous people, but the city was then still destroyed by God because of the wickedness of its people. There were not 10 righteous people in the city!

Peter tells us God "***is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.***" 2 Peter 3:9-10 (NIV) In his words we are reminded that the Day of Judgment will come unexpectedly, just as our own death may come unexpectedly.

In the parable of the fig tree, Jesus shows God's patience – up to a point. In this parable, there has been no fruit from the tree, so the owner of the vineyard tells the caretaker to cut it down.

The caretaker pleads, wait, please. "***'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If not, then cut it down.'***"

This parable is intended to reinforce Jesus' words of warning about repentance.

In this parable Jesus compared the nation of Israel to a fruitless fig tree in the same way that God's prophets did in the Old Testament. In a later situation, in the last week of his life, Jesus pronounced a curse against a fig tree, declaring that it would never bear fruit again. To Jesus, both trees demonstrated Israel's lack of faith. He was clearly revealed to the Jewish nation as the Messiah, but they, by and large, refused to believe.

God had given the Jewish people every opportunity to bear fruit, but they were still unfruitful. But God would give them a final chance through the ministry of Jesus. If they persisted in their unbelief and sin, they would be cut down from their privileged position as the chosen people of God.

God in Jeremiah says of his chosen people: "***I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?***" Jeremiah 2:21 (NIV) In our Old Testament lesson Isaiah also speaks of God's chosen people: God, the owner of the vineyard "***built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. 'Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been***

*done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.’ The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”* Isaiah 5:2-7 (NIV) That is like the lesson Jesus teaches in the parable of the fig tree.

Jesus gives a similar picture when he tells us *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”* John 15:1-6 (NIV)

The fig tree that didn’t bear any fruit wasn’t just taking up room. It had a negative effect on everything around it. In a similar way, the unbelieving Jewish people not merely did not bring forth fruits of righteousness, but through them the name of God was blasphemed among Gentiles.

Jesus himself has these warnings elsewhere for the leaders of the Jews: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. .... ”* *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.”* Matthew 23:13-15 (NIV)

The Apostle Paul also gives a warning to the Jews, which can certainly apply also to us: *“As it is written: ‘God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”* Romans 2:24 (NIV) Israel had not produced the fruit God was seeking.

Jesus’ warnings to repent remind us that Jesus is the one who is interceding before God the Father for them and for us.

Remember that impenitence leads to perishing eternally.

It is because of God’s patience we are not consumed every time we sin, as Jeremiah tells us in his Lamentations: *“It is [because] of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”* Lamentations 3:22 (KJV)

We must remember that the door of repentance is left open to all. They are warned that it is only they themselves who make their doom inevitable by unbelief and lack of repentance.

Lord, lead us to daily repentance, every day, to lives of repentance so that we may inherit the gift of God – eternal life – through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.