

# **What's Your Legacy?**

**(Accidents/Tragedies Happen)**

**Third Sunday in Lent**

**Luke 13:1-9**

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Community of Joy Lutheran Church

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

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I. What do you want your tombstone to say? There's usually not too much space - so whatever it is must (by necessity) be somewhat short.

A. Some of you - who listened well and have good memories - may remember that I said this last week (right at the end of the sermon), "I am convinced that, in the end, we could not have any better words on our tombstones than these, 'And she/he believed the Lord.'" Those very words were spoken about Abram in Genesis 15:6. "And he believed the Lord." Those are pretty awesome and meaningful words, however there are certainly other possibilities. My wife and I have our stones in the Memorial Garden already. Mine says, "Jesus Loves Us" on one line, and then the next line says, "Live - Love - Laugh." Cheryl's says, "Singing with Joy" and "Psalm 100." Oftentimes folks just put Bible verse numbers on their stones. That makes the viewers of the stone go home and look it up. I've always enjoyed the

amusing comment about the appropriate tombstone inscription for a hypochondriac. It's suggested that it could say, "See, I told you I was sick!"

B. Nowadays, with all of our "modern technological abilities," it's possible for a person to prerecord a tombstone message. The tombstone would then have a speaker and a button. Pressing the button would allow the prerecorded message to be played. That could be sort of "freaky" - couldn't it? "Hi, this is Ross. I guess I must be dead. Thanks so much for coming by my grave-site today. Could you move your left foot over a little. Thanks - that's much better! Have a nice day!" That could/would be weird - wouldn't it?

C. But why the talk about graves and tombstones? Well, the gospel text for today makes us think about the possibility of dying; either in an accident (a natural disaster), or by some human evil. This section of Luke has the heading - "The Call to Repentance" in my study Bible. Here's how those verses for today are written in the Living Bible. "About this time he (Jesus) was informed that Pilate had butchered some Jews from Galilee as they were sacrificing at the Temple in Jerusalem. 'Do you think they were worse sinners than other men from Galilee?' Jesus asked. 'Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And don't you realize that you also will perish unless you leave your evil ways and turn to God?' 'And what about the eighteen men who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? Not at all! And you, too, will perish unless

you repent.” (Luke 13:1-5). Jesus is trying to tell us (in essence) that the desire to find correlations between suffering and sin are fruitless and miss the point - which is “all sinners need repentance.”

D. Probably the Galileans, who were fanatical nationalists, had created a disturbance in Jerusalem. Pilate, who was there during the feast, had sent soldiers to intervene. The result was a bloody clash in the temple courts. Such action was entirely in keeping with Pilate’s known ruthless character. Pilate’s intervention would be considered a “human-made disaster.” However, Jesus alluded to a different happening that had been the talk of the town, and he drew a similar conclusion. Jesus mentioned the eighteen folks killed when the Siloam Tower fell and crushed them. Again he said that their deaths had nothing to do with any retribution on God’s part. He then went on to say (paraphrasing), “But, if you all are not ready to die, and right with God, then you await a dismal fate.”

E. We have lived through times in which there have been many, many disasters - some caused by humans (like 9/11), and others like the earthquake that just happened in Chile. In all of these disasters, whether caused by humans or by natural causes, many folks lament greatly and cry out, “Why God, why? Why did you let this happen? What did the people do wrong to deserve such an ending?” So, did the people of Chile do something horribly wrong - which brought about this huge earthquake? Based on this gospel text - I would say that Jesus would say, “No,

they didn't." But, what do some humans do? Did any of you hear what Pat Robertson (supposedly a religious man) said about the Haiti earthquake? He said that the Haiti quake came about because the people of Haiti made a pact with Satan many, many years ago, and because of that God punished them with this earthquake. No! No! No! That is not backed-up by scripture. Just the opposite is true. Jesus says, "It's not because of what they did."

II. O.K. then - some might ask, "Why did Jesus tell the disciples these things?"

A. These "happenings" give Jesus the opportunity to confront his hearers with the call to faith and obedience. He is saying (in essence) these kinds of things happen (and will continue to happen), therefore be ready - one of them might happen to you (or someone you know or love). Now is the time for us to make sure our walk is right with God. Are we living a righteous life? Are we on the path to God? Our end (here on earth) could come at any time - are we ready?

B. Maybe we should check our "To-Do List." Let's see - we have: "clean the litter boxes," "walk the dog daily," "sweep the front stoop," "hose the pine pollen off of the deck," "buy groceries," "get gas," "repent," and "pray!" Whoa! We've got "repent and pray" at the bottom of the list? That's taking a chance that we won't get to those things very soon. Maybe (not "maybe" really, but absolutely) we should move repent and pray to the top of the

list - to the top of the list every day! That speaks to the priorities we put on the things in our life - doesn't it? One thing that is a "given" - is that we are sinners, and as such, we need God's grace, forgiveness and mercy every day of our lives.

C. As sinners we should realize that it is not really appropriate for us to say, "Why God, why?" It is really more appropriate for us to say, "Why not us God, why not us?" That's what we deserve. Scripture says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). In our two confessions we say these words, "We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have loved our neighbors as ourselves." And, "We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin." That all sounds pretty bad - doesn't it? But we have Good News. God loves us anyway. God sent Jesus to save us even though we do not deserve that salvation. Jesus redeemed us. He paid the price for our eternal life.

D. We, my friends, are very fortunate that God and Jesus are our judges (rather than other human beings). We, like the fruitless fig tree in the gospel text, should be "cut down" because we are wasting the good soil. Fortunately though, Jesus says, let them live another year, and hopefully they will produce in the year to come. What should we produce? God would have us produce "fruits of the Spirit." In Galatians 5:22-23 we are told what these

“fruits” are. It says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” There are nine pretty wonderful things there! Let me state them again: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I’d say that would be a pretty good goal for all of us. Help us, Lord God, to produce these “fruits” - each day. If we were to do that, maybe our tombstone could say, “Fruit Producer.” Let it be so. Amen.