

3rd Sunday in Lent

Grace, mercy and peace are yours because of God's overflowing mercy and long-suffering patience for sinners.

NIV Luke 13:1 now there was some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were guiltier than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." 6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Introduction: "It's time." Those words start a chain reaction of chemicals in our brains. Nervousness, excitement, anticipation, joy, anxiety and fear may have all shot through your body with those two simple words, "It's time." It would all depends on what it is time for... the game to start, a baby to be born, a test to begin, to pay the piper, to meet your maker. Taken from the words of Jesus in our gospel lesson today,

It's time... to repent! Because...
We are helpless and hopeless sinners
God is patient and merciful.
Jesus Christ is working for us and in us.

Part 1) We are helpless and hopeless sinners.

While Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us, sinners, some people were talking about a horrendous event that happened to some out-of-towners at the temple. Some Galileans were at the temple offering their sacrifices when they were murdered by Pontius Pilate. Jesus could read their hearts and minds. The people were thinking to themselves that those Galileans "had it coming, they were worse than other people." This is a common thought to us as well, when someone meets a violent death like that or the other instance Jesus tells of 18 people killed in Jerusalem from an accident, a tower fell on them.

When that earthquake hit Haiti, people were talking about and pointing at the Voodoo and witchcraft being practiced in that country. When the hurricane hit New Orleans and the levies and pumping stations were overwhelmed killing thousands, people were talking about the sinfulness of Bourbon Street and the Voodoo practices found in old New Orleans. I'm sure people will talk of the unbelief and wickedness of the Chilean people. We instinctively look for the reason why it happened to them and in that place and not to us in this place – our human minds jump to the conclusion that they met a terrible end because they are worse people than us – they had it coming for their sins.

Jesus tells us today and for us to remember everyday, "No, they are not guiltier or worse sinners than you!" The Galileans that were murdered while they worshipped God, the Israelites that were crushed by the tower, the people of New Orleans, the Haitians and Chileans were not worse sinners or guiltier than you and me.

How can this be? Why we are not destroyed like them if we are both just as sinful, just as guilty? Why can't we understand this? The problem we have with this is that we simply don't understand our own sinfulness. Sinfulness is not just your performance; sinfulness is what you are. Sinfulness is not something that gets better or gets worse depending on your actions. Sinfulness is what we were born with from our sinful parents. Once you have sinfulness, it's over. There's no rehabilitation. There's no graded scale of more or less sinfulness. Either you are sinless or sinful. There's no half sinful, half good person. There's no such thing as good sinful people and bad sinful people. Either you are sinful or you are not. Are you sinful? Is a yes or no answer! It is not a well lets talk about this, let's look at the alcoholics, the unfaithful husbands, the neglectors of God's Word, the liars, the cheaters, the misers, the lazy good for nothings.

When we understand that sinfulness is what are and taints everything we do then we know, “It’s time...time to repent.” The tragic sad story in all these catastrophic terrible untimely deaths is that sinful people died still sinful. The warning is there for all of us, it’s time for us to repent. Turn away from sin and turn toward God. Why haven’t we been destroyed for our sinfulness? The answer is not because we are not sinful or that we performed better and deserve a long life and blessings. Simply, we are no better. We are not destroyed because God is patient and merciful

Part 2) God is patient and merciful

When we go through life and seem to escape death, punishment and have lived a blessed life, the devil whispers in our ear, “See, God doesn’t care that you sin. He is not going to punish you for sins. You actually are better than other people.” When tragedy happens, health, job, loved ones are taken away - we stand up and look into the sky and shake our fist at God yelling, “I deserve better. I was doing a good job and earned blessings! Where are they? Where are you? Do you even exist? Do you even care?” No! We have it all wrong. There’s only one explanation as to why we are destroyed like others in this world have been. God is patient and merciful to us giving us time to repent and bring him fruit he expects.

Jesus teaches with objects, and to imprint into the mind of the people the picture of God’s patience and mercy to helpless hopeless sinners; he tells the story of a Fig Tree. A rich man bought some fig trees and hired a gardener to care for it. Year after year he cared for the fig tree but when each season came and went without fruit on the tree he continued to pump resources into the fig tree: water, fertilizer, pruning, weeding, and cultivation. Yet no fruit appeared from the fig tree. Sooner or later the time had to come. Uproot the fig tree and get a new one, this one is wasting resources that could go to a fig tree that would produce fruit.

The picture is so simple yet so powerful. God our heavenly Father is so merciful and patient with us he leaves our past sins unpunished. He doesn’t destroy the sinner as soon as they sin; he has a plan to save sinners. He graciously sent his son to produce the fruit he expects. Jesus Christ lived a life filled with good works – fruits for God. Then God took all the unfruitful years of sins and dumped them on to Jesus giving the world of sinners all the fruit, good works that he expects from his people. What great mercy God has shown to dead sinners. It’s time. It’s time to repent. Look at God’s great mercy and patience he has shown to us helpless sinners in the sacrifice of His son Jesus. Turn from sin and turn to the Lord and His Word.

Part 3) Jesus Christ is working in us and for us.

But how can we repent, when we are so tainted by sin that our every thought and emotion is tainted with selfishness and we have already been unfruitful for so long? We can repent and produce great fruits of faith because Jesus Christ is working for us and in us. Did you see Jesus in the parable he told? Jesus was the man who worked on the fig tree, fertilizing, watering and caring for it over all those years. And even more than that Jesus was the one interceding or asking the owner of the fig tree for more time to work on it that it might produce good fruit.

Through faith, you and I can produce good fruit for God. The great fruit that God expects we can give him. You and I have been connected to Jesus Christ. He works in us. He works for us. Through His Spirit we have been given a new life. The power of Jesus Christ courses through our veins. The strength of our faith determines the good work that we can do for the Lord and for His people.

Often times, I hear people say things like, “you don’t want me in charge of anything in the church. I’m not the one you need. There’s nothing I’m good for doing. I’m not a good speaker. I’m not a good parent. I’m not a good friend. I’m not a good child. I’m not...” Yeah, I know that’s your old dead helpless, hopeless sinfulness talking. You and I are regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit through baptism and the Word of God. The power of Jesus Christ courses through our veins pumping energy and strength to do great things for God – fruit that he expects.

God tells us best about our great ability to do great things for His Kingdom in the letter to the NIV Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

“It’s time.” When you hear of terrible things happening to people around the world and in our own backyard, remember, “It’s time...time for us to repent because we are just as sinful, helpless and hopeless but because of God’s mercy and patience we can turn away from sin and turn toward the Lord’s Word because of the power Jesus Christ to gives us faith to do great things for His Kingdom! It’s time to repent.