

Lent 3, 2022
March 20 & 21, 2022

As you watch the events of the war in Ukraine, how do you feel? It's disturbing to see so many reports of evil and senseless acts of violence against innocent people, isn't it? It tears your heart out to watch millions of people leaving their homes with not much more than the clothing on their backs and a few little precious things, right? As you watch those scenes unfold, you can't help but ask the question: "Why?"

Why does God allow tragedies happen all around the world? Every day there seems to be acts of nature like earthquakes, fires or storms. You can pick up the paper or look online and see senseless acts of one person shooting another for no good reason at all. Why did God allow nine people die in a fiery, head-on collision in west Texas, including 6 New Mexico University students and a coach who were returning from a golf tournament, as well as a 13 year old and another man. You can't help but ask the question: "Why?" We certainly are no strangers to tragedies around us every day, are we?

It really hits home when one of those really bad things come into our lives. How do we feel when it's not just one of those things that happen across the world, but it happens in my home, in my family, at my work place? We ask "Why?" The really hard part is when we don't want to wait for the answer from God. We let our minds try to come up with all kinds of answers to that question: Why? People have asked about that question for years.

The people during Jesus' day were also asking Jesus the same question – Why? Our text begins: **"Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, '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. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?'"**

There were 2 events that are being discussed here. The first was an act of violence done by Pilate. The Roman governor clearly didn't like something these people had done and retaliated by ordering Roman soldiers to butcher them in public. His soldiers carried out his orders and killed them in the temple. The blood from the Jews who were murdered mixed with the blood of the animals that had been used for sacrifices in the temple. This was a shocking event for the Jews living in Jerusalem. The second was a deadly accident where what seems to be part of the defensive wall around the city had just randomly collapsed. When the dust cleared and those underneath were unburied, eighteen of them were dead.

When something tragic like this happens, people begin to wonder why this person lived and that person died. Did God allow this person to die because he was punishing them because they were a worse sinner than someone else? Why didn't the tower fall the other and kill 18 people on the other side? Were those 18 people killed worse sinners than the people on the other side of the tower? These questions are not unusual questions, are they? Jesus quickly gives the answer to their questions. **"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He turns the conversation away from where to others stand to where do I stand. We live in a sinful world. Evil things happen. Tragic accidents happen. It doesn't mean that those things happen because someone had it coming to them. But Jesus wants to get his audience to think: *If I were to die tonight, would I be ready?* The Bible makes it clear that there is no difference between people. We all are all equal sinners. We all deserve the same punishment for our sins. Therefore, if God would ask you tonight to give him a reason that you deserve to enter heaven, the answer would be: *I have none*. The only way we can get there by ourselves, is that we need to be perfect. None of us are. To answer that question, however, Jesus is going to use a parable.

"A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 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?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Who are these people in the parable? The owner of the vineyard is God the Father. The caretaker is Jesus. We are the trees. Jesus' point is simple: Repent. Turn from sin and turn to me. He says to each of us: *take everything about you that is wrong, bring it to me, and let me give you everything that I have and have done for you.* Jesus calls us to take our sin and give it to him and let him give us forgiveness. Jesus' call to repentance should not be a call of terror. It should be like the call of a doctor who says: *come to me, and let me give you the medicine that will make you better.* This is a call of Jesus' love. It is with Jesus that we will face the tragedies in life. It is with Jesus that we will get through any tragedy that we might face in the future.

Look at the love the caretaker has for us. **“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”** Jesus' parable tells us just how patient our God is. God must get frustrated with us so many times. He's told us what to do and we don't. Yet, Jesus says that he will do whatever is necessary for us to live with him. He will care for us. He will fertilize us. He will do whatever it takes to care for us. He will do whatever it takes to assure us that our sins are forgiven in him. That's the love that Jesus has for each of us. May that love be with you in every tragedy that you might face. Amen.