

Luke 13:1-9

Lent 3; February 28 & 29, 2016

Are we asking the right question?

It happened again this week in central Kansas.

- A man named Cedric Ford went on a shooting spree. When it was over, three people were dead and sixteen people were injured.
- 150 people killed in the French Alps because the co-pilot flew the plane into the mountainside.
- 8 people are killed and 200 people injured as an Amtrak train derails in Philadelphia.
- A reporter and cameraman are killed on live TV.
- A gunman forces his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. and shoots and kills 20 first graders and six adults.
- Over 3,000 people killed as the World Trade Center Buildings collapse.
- Tornadoes, earthquakes, and all kinds of other natural disasters take the lives of innocent people.

After all these different tragedies, there is one question that will most likely be asked by someone: *“Why does God let these things happen?”* That’s a tough one to answer isn’t it? Some will say: *“God must have a plan.”* While it is true that all things work out together for good, these words, *“God must have a plan,”* don’t really bring much comfort to those who are in the middle of some kind of disaster. My mind can think of all kinds of different ways that God could have a much better plan than the one unfolding in front of us.

Yet, we ask the *“why”* question? We want the answer to that question. It’s a natural question. It’s a logical question. Sometimes, God may not give us the answer. Yes, there are times that things happen as a consequence from a specific sin. There are times that God may use something to bring us back to him. Then there are times that we have absolutely no answer to that question. Perhaps, we may even be asking the wrong question. Instead of asking *WHY*, we should be asking *“what if...”*. Let us take a look at the words of our text this morning and see: ***Are we asking the right question?***

“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?”

The Roman Governor, Pilate, was known for his brutality. But he was also not a stupid ruler. Pilate would not just go into the temple and kill some Galileans without a cause. That would just be dumb. We don’t know the details behind this story. It must have been a familiar story to the people of Jesus’ day. The way that Jesus asks the question in our text might give us a clue as to how people felt about this newspaper headline. **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”** Jesus could read the minds of people. Some have speculated that there were a group of Galileans who had it coming to them. They were looking to pick a fight with the Roman governor. As a result, Pilate slaughtered these Galileans even if it mixed with the blood of their sacrifices. Based on Jesus’ reply to this gruesome report, it seems that there were those who thought: *These guys had it coming to them.* It seems as if people would have answered Jesus’ question with the answer: *YES.* Jesus gives them the answer that some didn’t expect: **“I tell you, no!”**

Jesus draws their attention to another disaster that the people would have been familiar with: **“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?”** Even though not much is known about this incident, it seems like one of those tragic events that sometimes happen. In a moment, things changed for those who were perhaps in the healing waters of the pool of Siloam. Yet, Jesus puts both of these same incidents into the same group. (Jesus healing the blind man; Hezekiah built tunnel which brought life.) Were the people in both of these incidents being punished by God because God was made at them? Jesus says: NO.

In this text, Jesus wants them to look at the question: What if death comes suddenly to you, no matter the circumstances. There is one thing that is certain for every one of us here today – Death is certain! As that death comes to each of us, we need to ask the question: *Are you ready?* How are we ready for such an event when it comes? Jesus gives us the answer to THAT question: **“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”** The need for this repentance is all the more urgent because you may not know when your life will end. If that would be where Jesus stops, we would not see God’s mercy and love.

Jesus doesn’t want us to lose sight of that love and mercy. To show that truth, he tells a short 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. 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.'”**

Did you catch God’s love in those words? Who is the gardener who will go to any length to save the tree so that it will produce fruit? It’s Jesus. In this season of Lent, we are reminded what length Jesus went through for me and you. Jesus’ whole purpose of coming to this world is to go to the cross on Calvary. Jesus loves us so much that he willing to go to bat for us, even when we may not be batting for him. He wants to prune us. He wants to water us. He wants to fertilize us. He is willing to do all this because he wants us to have something that is better than anything this earth can offer. He wants us to have heaven. Sometimes, you and I forget that. We hang on to the things of this world. We think we have to solve every problem in our lives. We begin to think, what am I doing wrong? What didn’t someone else do? Why is God punishing us?

It is at those times that we need to remember that God doesn’t work that way. He doesn’t punish us for our sins, because he punished his Son, Jesus, for them. He has taken all our sins and loaded them on Jesus. Perhaps, all the things that happen in life around us are there so that we can have the answer to the question: What if death comes suddenly? Are we ready? In Christ, we can answer that question with one word: YES! Amen.