

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2020

St. Luke 13:1-9; Ezekiel 33:7-20; I Corinthians 10:1-3

“Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With . . .

Oh! This Is Talking to Me!”

I. The Bible Tells Us So.

II. Unless.

III. About God’s Love.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

After reading the text for this morning, my thoughts were taken back to an incident from many years ago when a woman called the church and wanted to talk to me. She immediately stated she would not give me her name and then said, "but I thought you should know what one of your members is doing." She stated the member's name. I stopped her and said, "If 'so and so' is endangering life or property then you should call the police. Otherwise, you should first go and talk to the person, and if the person doesn't listen you can tell them that you will talk with me and the three of us will meet together." The woman hung-up.

Do you remember this from the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: "The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men....' But the tax collector, standing far off...beat his breast saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'"? (Lk. 18:11 & 13) Do you remember that? It's amazing how self-righteous and arrogant people can sometimes be.....can't we?

This third Sunday of Lent, *Calvary's Climb Confronts Us With . . .*

OH! THIS IS TALKING TO ME!

I. The Bible Tells Us So.

There isn't any question about the fallen nature of this world and Scripture warnings that God's people are to be discerning and not embrace this world's ways. We do make judgments. Not the arrogant, self-righteous kind, but the ones where Jesus teaches us, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits." (Matt. 7:15-16) Or the judgements based on the Holy Spirit's admonition: "...watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." (Rom 16:17)

What's confronting us this morning is seeing the sin of others that we don't like while ignoring the reality of the sin in us; the sin that is always there and raising its ugly, self-righteous head! It's what Jesus said:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?...You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matt. 7:1-5)

We take to heart the words of Paul from our Epistle lesson: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) And we would be very wise in taking to heart God's Word from Ezekiel, our Old Testament lesson: "Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die." (Ez. 33:13)

I have to confess it: "Oh! This is talking to me!" It's talking to us. The Bible tells us so. That brings us to our text . . .

II. Unless.

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered that way? No, I tell you, but unless

you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (vv. 1-5)

Of these two incidents Martin Franzmann wrote:

"The incident of *Pilate* killing *Galileans* while they were engaged in *sacrifice* is otherwise unknown but is of a piece with known instances of his brutal disregard for the religious feelings of the people whom he governed.

"Siloam was a pool which formed part of the water-supply system of Jerusalem; the collapse of the tower probably occurred during construction on the water system." (Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, CPH, St. Louis, 1979, p. 71)

The point? Those who were present with Jesus at that moment saw such disasters as punishment from God for some horrible sin. They figured they were removed from such judgment. Franzmann noted, "Thus they could remain aloof and secure in their own sense of righteousness; they did not 'know how to interpret the present time' and remained 'hypocrites.'" (Ibid, p. 71) Franzmann refers to the killing of the Galileans and the incident at Siloam as "portents of the judgment of God which impends *over all* unless they *repent*."

It is noteworthy that not too many years later the Roman armies would kill thousands more than the 18 who died at the Tower of Siloam. They would destroy the Temple and Jerusalem, and scatter the Jewish nation throughout the Roman Empire. The incidents concerning the Galileans and Siloam still stand as warnings against all self-righteousness; judgment against those locking themselves into self-deceit, self-righteousness, and wagging their tongues against others. Twice Jesus warns: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." The "unless" is warning. It is speaking to us.

The issue isn't somebody else. The issue is you. Me. The issue isn't how good or bad others have been compared to you or me. The issue is, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) For the child of God, the issue is daily repentance - being daily confronted by our sin that we might never grow self-righteous. The issue is the Law and Gospel; confronting our sin and receiving the mercy and love of God through faith in Christ's suffering, death and Resurrection. I have said it a multitude of times, I'll say it now: If anyone here is tired of or angry over being confronted with their sin, then they're self-righteous and tired of hearing about Jesus!

Jesus goes on to say . . .

III. About God's Love.

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, "Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" And he answered him, "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." (vv. 6-9)

The owner of the vineyard is God. The fig tree is the church. The vinedresser is Jesus. The three years is the era of grace granted to Israel and certainly the church today. The unrepentant heart will be cut down. It has been stated, "And yet God's love is still at work to move His people to repentance; the vinedresser still digs and nurtures the tree to save it from its doom."

One of my Seminary professors from many years ago wrote, "We cannot sin with impunity, excusing our failure. Are we playing Christianity, saying 'Lord, Lord' while our hearts are far from Him, substituting ritual for repentance? 'Let it alone this year also,' is a warning for us. We are in a probationary period. God's patience has an end. There will come a time when he will say, 'Cut it down.'"

Law and Gospel. These are the two main doctrines of Scripture that must never be compromised. The Law reminding us of our sinful nature and keeping us from self-righteousness. The Gospel impressing upon us the great mercy and love of God in Christ to forgive and forgive and forgive! With the Law our Lord Jesus, the Vinedresser, digs, laying bare our sin. With the Gospel he fertilizes - strengthening our faith in Christ as payment for sin and producing in us the fruit of good deeds.

It has been stated, "...to repent is to turn to the Lord, to be the Lord's, to look to the Lord, to rely on the Lord, to expect good from the Lord. It is the very opposite of grumbling and complaining, for to repent is the ultimate praise. For when we repent, we confess the One who had promised to forgive, and who sealed that promise in His own blood."

He marches to the Cross for us. The Scriptures are clear: "...now is the favorable time; behold now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2b) He is talking to - all!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott