

LENT 3

YEAR C

ISAIAH 55:1-9

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

LUKE 13:1-9

MARCH 23, 24, 2019

Last week was the news about many being shot and killed at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. 50 people were in the mosque as gun fire broke out killing many that were there worshipping. In recent weeks and months, we heard about innocent people being shot and killed in church, at the mall or in movie theaters. Our people mourn for those that have been victims of other kinds of violence. We cry out to our leaders asking that something be done to prevent such acts of violence but before something is done we return to life as normal and routine.

I heard in the news that much of our country will face flooding of one kind or another. Snow is melting, and the spring rains will surely come. Many will endure flooding but then comes the clean-up and the rebuilding. We are coming near to tornado season. Some will explain to us how tornadoes are formed, but the result is that there will be destruction of property and injured lives. Tornadoes and other natural disasters destroy lives and property.

Our readings today talk about seeking the Lord where and while he can be found. We hear in Isaiah that God's ways are higher than our ways. He warns us to seek God's ways. 1 Corinthians 10 warns us to not be ignorant of the Lord's ways but to learn from God and to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about those that displeased God and were struck down in the wilderness. He says that we must not indulge ourselves in things that are contrary to God. Luke tells us about a couple of incidents that are not explained in scripture and not found in history books. One story is about things that happened to innocent people who were worshipping. The other story is about a natural disaster that claimed the lives of many people.

Luke 13:1, 2 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

Some came to Jesus asking about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices. The story behind the question has to do with Pilate not understanding the Jews and their need to worship. He did not understand that they would die before allowing a Roman to desecrate their worship space. The story of Pilate mingling blood with the sacrifice may be about Pilate's desire to use Temple funds to build a much-needed aqueduct in Jerusalem. The idea was a good one, but the funding solution was not. When the Jews rebelled against the plan Pilate had them killed. One of the questions dealt with in this lesson is about sin being the cause of death. It is also about some being worse sinners than others. Were those that were killed by Pilate worse sinners than those that were not killed? Are those killed when the tower of Siloam fell over worse sinners than those that were not killed?

Many would judge the Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand as not being right with God because of their religious practice. Some might say that they were targeted because they are not Christian. If we think this way we also need to apply the same thoughts to Christians whose buildings have been burned, sprayed with paint and had other acts of violence done. We need to remember that many Christians have been shot and killed while at church.

Luke 13:4, 5 **Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”**

Are people in the flood plain in Cedar Rapids and other places in Eastern Iowa worse sinners than we that live on higher ground? Are these events caused by one people being worse sinners than others? Many have said that the people in earthquake zones and in flood zones are being judged by God. It was said after the floods in New Orleans several of years ago that God was judging the people in New Orleans for their actions and their behaviors. There is biblical precedent for God sending a flood that cleanses the earth, but God has compassion on God's people. Yes, God does have the right to judge and judgment will come. The time will come when God stops giving one more chance to repent and the judgment will come but this reading from Luke's gospel is not about one person being a bigger sinner than another.

I believe that all of the hardships and disasters are the result of sin. I am not talking about individual sins of the people. I am talking about the sin of Adam and Eve. Fallen humanity resulted in a fallen world. We are a broken people living in a broken world where storms happen and the earth shakes. The scriptures tell us that sin created a mess for the world where thorns and thistles seek to choke out the crops and where storms rage. If you read the creation stories you know that God created the world and all things lived in harmony with everything else. The lion laid down with the lamb. There was no need of pesticides and herbicides because weeds did not grow in your garden or among your crops. Sin brought separation with God and that messed with the harmony of God's creation.

When Jesus addresses this business of sin causing a certain disaster, whether by humans or by the natural happenings in life, he is not saying that one sin is better or worse than another. He is not saying that those killed and told about in this lesson are worse than another. Jesus says that they are not worse sinners, but we need to repent anyway. Lent is a season of repentance. It is a time for us to examine our lives and our thoughts. We all have a need to repent. We must repent daily and make our confession to God. Jesus says that unless we repent we will also perish as the others did. I know God hates sin. I also know that God's grace is more powerful than God's judgment.

Repentance is more than a change in the ways we do things. It is changing our hearts, but it is also more than that. Repentance is finally declaring that I can do nothing to change my heart and my life. Only God can do that. As long as I believe that I must change myself I will not repent. When I try to change my life it always ends in destruction. When I insist on my way I always fail. When Jesus says we must repent, he is saying that we must let God be the leader. We must cling to the promises of God. We must get out of the driver's seat and let God do the driving.

Hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and events like those in Christchurch are not sent by God. Our Lord gives life and does not seek to destroy it. As we face our

struggles we seek the comfort that comes from Jesus Christ. We look forward to the assurance that God is near and has not turned away. God does not cause these events, but Jesus says that we need to repent and return to the Lord. This season of Lent is set aside that we might return to the Lord our God. God is faithful and God is merciful. God is abounding in steadfast love and will give you a second chance. God wants life for you throughout eternity. God loves you and has done everything necessary that you would have eternal life and a better life while on this earth. Repent and live. Seek the Lord and trust in God's promise of life. God's grace is more powerful than God's judgment. AMEN