

Meeting Christ in Our Everyday Lives:  
In Random Suffering  
Deuteronomy 28: 1-8, 15-20  
Luke 13:1-9  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

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Okay, so the time change may have been a little rough, but you woke up this morning, the weather had broken a little, the sun was out. It felt like spring: its coming! This feels good! Let's go to church!

**REPENT or PERISH!!**

Welcome. I hope you had your coffee because you need to be awake for this one. Repent or perish. It's not exactly what we would think of as the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the one hand we can kind of get on board with it. We like that idea, for other people. We like on some level the idea that people get what they deserve. You know why that happened to that guy? Well, he was involved in this and if you're going to do that you get what you deserve. But there's a problem.

People in this world don't get what they deserve; doesn't happen all the time. Some people don't repent and it sure doesn't look like they perish. Some people spent their lives repenting only to be faced with more and more and more suffering. People don't get what they deserve.

We want to know why. When something bad happens to us or happens to someone we love and there seems to be no reason for it, we want to know why. We can sit around a table in a conference room with our Bibles open with our Book of Confessions and we can say wholeheartedly in that arena we don't believe that God causes suffering; that we don't believe that God punishes us in any way. We can talk about stories in the paper and say that was tragic but I don't believe God caused that to happen. But I'd be willing to bet that I am not the only one that as soon as something bad happens to me, or to someone I know, or to someone I love one of the first things I do is look up and ask God why. Why? Why did this happen? We ask; people in scripture ask.

Pilate had plans for building, the Romans loved to build. He wanted to use some of the Temple money for his construction projects. The Galileans were a feisty bunch, so he told his soldiers to make sure that they did not get out of hand.

The Galileans protested and it was Pilate's soldiers who got out of hand. Now these people come to Jesus and asking him why, why did this happen? We ask now and we try to come up with reasons. We try to explain it away. And it just doesn't work.

I was in Seminary with someone who shared an experience she had in our Pastoral care class. We were all involved in our field education with various churches and then we'd meet once a week to discuss what was going on in the churches we were serving. This person had been called to the hospital to meet with a family who had just given birth to a stillborn child.

The child would have been the younger sibling to a three-year-old that was at home with relatives. The student told them that they just need to praise God for what they had. I was sick to my stomach when I heard that. Not because I would have known what to say, but I don't believe God always expects our praise.

That family may come to a point somewhere down the road where, yes, they can recognize that they do have a beautiful child and that they had been truly blessed. What happened was tragic but they had been blessed. But they were not at that point in the hospital. I knew this other student well enough to know that her desire was to just say something.

Because I believe the only honest answer is one that we, as ministers or we as people who are trying to comfort other people, feel do not go very far. The only answer I believe in a situation like that, when that family or these Galileans ask you why. The only answer that I can only think of that is truly honest is: I don't know, I don't know, but it is horrible, and I will sit with you as long as you will like.

We ask why. Even Jesus says this to the Galileans, do you think that this happened because these people were any worse than anybody else? He says no. But at the same time, there is a challenge for each of us. That challenge is how are we going to act? How are we going to live our lives? How are we going approach this world? It's easy to sit back now because we do see so much suffering in this world. It's easy to sit back and say, this is too big. What can I do, there's too much?

I heard a commercial on the radio this morning on my way in. You've probably heard it too. It says: Remember that time that you almost volunteered? We see the problems in this world and we think '*world hunger is huge; there is*

*nothing I can do about that.*' On one level that is true. There is no person in this room that on their own accord can decide that no one will be hungry anymore, I'm taking care of them.

The struggle is when we see those problems as SO big, and the suffering is SO large that we decide to do nothing. We think *I wish there was something I could do.* Maybe you can't solve world hunger. But you can cook for P.A.D.S. Maybe you can't educate every child in Africa, but you can tutor a child in North Chicago.

God knows that we can't solve these things. God knows that no individual is going to have a miracle cure for everything that is going on in this world. But God knows that we should try. God knows what we are capable of. We are not capable of explaining suffering. We are not capable of telling anybody why anything bad happened to them. But God knows that we are capable of helping to alleviate the suffering that is around of. God knows that we can do something.

Fig trees would take three years to grow and mature. If fig trees, or any tree, would be planted anywhere they could find soil, in that part of the world it's hard to grow a whole lot. If they found fertile soil, they planted something.

This fig tree is not only taking up space, but it's taking up valuable space. And it's not producing anything. Because it should have produced something after three years, the other thing that I read about fig trees is that if they don't bear fruit the first time they are supposed to, it's pretty much hopeless and they won't bear fruit at all.

And so on one level it seems hopeless for this fig tree, seems like it is done and it should be cut down. Except there is someone there who says: wait, let me tend to it a little more, let me work on it a little more and let's see what can happen.

That is Christ right there with each of us. Tending to us, working on us, giving us another chance when it may seem hopeless; he is right there with us.

I read that the average person in our country lives for 40 million minutes. It sounds like a lot, but they're also minutes and they go by quickly, but it's also a lot. It's a lot of changes to decide this minute right here, right now I'm going to do something. I can't explain the suffering, but I can help comfort those who are suffering. I can't explain the suffering, but I can help alleviate it. Right here, right now, this minute. Amen.