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**A Sermon on Luke 13:1-9**(NRSV)

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**Luke 13:1-9 (NRSV)**

**13**At that very time there were some present who told Jesus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2013%3A1-9%0A&version=NRSVue&interface=print&showfootnotes=no&showxrefs=no&showheadings=no&showwoj=no#fen-NRSVUE-25512a)] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2**He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? **3**No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. **4**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 other people living in Jerusalem? **5**No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”

**6**Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. **7**So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still, I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ **8**He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year until I dig around it and put manure on it. **9**If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Today’s gospel reading from Luke 13:1-9 is a passage that invites us to reflect deeply on repentance, grace, and God's patient love for us. At first glance, this passage might seem like a stern warning, but when we look more closely, it is also an invitation to transformation, healing, and hope, something we all need as we live out our faith in the world.

First, it is important to understand the context of this passage. Jesus is speaking to a crowd that is concerned about some recent tragic events. The first tragedy involves the killing of Galileans by the Roman governor Pilate, and the second tragedy is the collapse of a tower in Siloam. In both cases, the people around Jesus may have been asking, “Why did this happen? Were these people worse sinners than others?” Still today, our natural human impulse is often to try to make sense of suffering by finding fault in others, especially more fault than our own.

This is where Jesus gently and firmly corrects that way of thinking. He asks the crowd, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?” He answers his own question with a resounding “No!” And then he says, “Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” The connection that Jesus is making here is not that suffering is always a result of specific personal sin, but rather that all human beings, regardless of the suffering we experience, need repentance. We all fall short of God’s glory and need to turn toward God’s mercy (Romans 3:23). I don’t know about you, but I have spent plenty of time both comparing my actions to the actions of others and also comparing my suffering to the suffering of others. However, I can’t say that I have spent the same amount of time repenting for either. We know this about ourselves, and we know this about Christ’s church- which is why we begin our service with confession and forgiveness. EACH WEEK!

Jesus then goes on to tell the parable of the fig tree to further explain the call to repentance. A landowner comes to check on his fig tree, which has been barren for three years. The tree has not produced any fruit, and the owner wants to cut it down. But the gardener, in his mercy, pleads for more time. He asks the owner to give the tree one more chance by nurturing it. If, after a year, the tree still bears no fruit, then it can be cut down.

This parable speaks to the same theme as the first part of the passage: God is patient and merciful and gives us every opportunity to bear fruit. Sometimes, we need the time and space for God to cultivate in us the transformation that is needed so that we might bear the fruit of love, justice, and peace in the world. Ironically, cultivation requires the hard stuff, too: the manure, the yuck, and the muck that, in the end, helps us grow. This tells us that our suffering, our imperfect ways, and our experiences in life can also still bring growth. Thank goodness perfection isn’t the only path. If it were, our fig yields would be mighty low.

Repentance is a focus in today’s reading, and we need to understand what it truly means. The word “repent” comes from the Greek word metanoia (pronounced met-uh-no-uh), which means a change of mind, a shift, a turning away from one way of living and toward a new way. It’s not just about feeling bad or guilty for the things we’ve done wrong. Repentance is about an intentional turning—turning away from sin and turning toward God.

We understand repentance not only as an individual act of turning away from our sin but also as an ongoing process. We daily ask God to help us turn from our sinfulness and turn toward the life God desires for us. It is a way of continually coming back to God, acknowledging our failings, and opening ourselves to God’s grace. It’s an invitation to recognize the ways we fall short and the ways we are invited into healing, restoration, and new life. I don’t know about you, but for me, this work of acknowledging my failings and receiving God’s grace is on constant repeat. It is as regular as the sun setting and the sun rising. Thank God we have such a BIG God who takes us just as we are and who doesn’t give up on us.

And, of course, we, as God’s children, need to also do the work of expressing sincere regret or remorse for our actions. This means that, as we repent, we feel the weight of our actions and are sorry for the harm they cause, AND we take hold of the hope that God’s forgiveness IS real and that through repentance, we can be changed. None of us can stand before God with clean hands on our own. All of us, at some level, are like the barren fig tree—failing to bear fruit, living in a way that is disconnected from God’s purpose for us. But we can turn towards God, trusting in God’s promises to make us whole. This is the good news of the Gospel—the invitation to repentance is itself a sign of God’s mercy and grace.

*[This would be a good time for you, the preacher, to insert a personal story of a time when you tried to acknowledge a behavior and you made a conscious decision to repent and change.]*

In a world that is moving so fast we can barely keep up and keep our heads above water, may you hear Jesus’ words as an invitation to us—a call not to condemnation but to transformation and renewal. God’s desire is not for us to live in fear of rejection but to live in the freedom that comes from forgiveness as named and claimed children of God.

We will indeed experience moments of failure, frustration, or confusion. But in these moments, God invites us to return to him—not with fear, but with hope. Repentance is not about being punished for our wrongs; it’s about being given another chance to live more fully in the love of God, a grace-filled opportunity to begin anew, to embrace the fullness of life God offers.

God’s love is unshakable, like the patient gardener who tends to us, pruning and nurturing us, always offering a chance to grow and bear fruit. May we respond to this invitation with open hearts, cultivating lives of love, and peace, and living as true children of God—wholly forgiven, continually renewed, and ever-growing in His mercy.

It is GREAT to be church together, Amen? Amen!