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

**1** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” **6** 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. **7** 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?’ **8** And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. **9** Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

**“Full Invested Savior”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Lent looks at more than sin, but the reality of death. Two things are certain in this life as the saying goes, “Death and taxes.” Of course, like kicking a can down the road. Few ever take time to write a will, plan for their funeral, or even bring up the topic with loved ones. This might seem to work, but death still rears up in our faces in terms of tragedy. The untimely events that fall upon people leave us in utter shock. It can be a human event like an atrocity of a school shooting or when a government massacres part of its population. It can be an event outside of man’s sinful nature in what insurance companies label as natural disaster. Tragedy is shocking to everyone. Tragedy is sad and painful. Tragedy is death at its worst.

Humankind tries to prevent death by increasing security or trying to create better laws. And no one want to see these tragic times saying, “I hope I do not have to die that way.” Even painful events like the holocaust or deadly abuse at home tempt some to look the other away as if it never happened. Incidents of suffering and tragedy are far from a sign of judgment over against others. The easy way out is always to write off the event upon sinners when the truth stands out today. Jesus says, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Not quite the comfort one would expect to hear for a community or person considering tragedy. Yet, the Son of man did not come to wallow around with sinners, but to turn all to Him and His Word of salvation. Fully invested as Savior means Jesus alone brings life out of death.

As we see in our text from St. Luke. God has always been patient with His chosen people. Jesus was straightforward about the prophets of old sent to Israel. There were big plans for those redeemed from slavery, protected repeatedly against death, and lifted up among the nations all by the promise of God’s Word. Yet, the verdict was anything of a victory. Jesus said, “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.” More than three mistakes, this owner of a fig tree waited three years for change. The decision finally to “cut it down” was not heavy handed. It was just being truthful to the situation, “Why should it use up the ground?” Israel wasted the attention of the prophets. John the Baptizer even declared, “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:9).

Three strikes you are out and we are not playing baseball! Does not matter if it is three minutes, three hours, three days, three years, or three lifetimes this world shows the tragic signs of judgment. The Law is consuming against fruitless people standing in wickedness. Sadly, it has never even been kind to anyone no matter how good a person. Ezekiel declared, “…the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins.” What strikes at life is to face how quickly death cuts all down. To live through a single day in a sinful world means God has been patient with judgment against sinners. Even if this is a sign of mercy, the tragedy of death does little to turn any to Him. “We cannot even love an angry God; the law always accuses us and thus always shows us an angry God. Therefore we must first take hold of the promise by faith, that for Christ’s sake the Father is reconciled and forgiving” (Tappert 152:295).

Waiting for sinners to produce their own salvation is like driving down a dead end road. You are never going to get anywhere. Israel never had the strength or dedication to follow the Law. Jesus reveals this in the parable showing the promise always rested by faith in God saving them. The vinedresser makes a lasting appeal of compassion for the fig tree. He proclaims, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.” The Father’s patience shines all glory upon the work of His Son. Jesus makes the appeal away from judgment to Himself as the Gospel. He cultivates lives by declaring, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Rather than waiting for fruit, this Gardner engages the lifeless fig tree so it can be fruitful. God’s Son spoke His forgiving Word, healed the helpless, casted out demons and took it at last to the cross. The manure pile of sinful death fell upon Him, but His sacrifice is now the source for all life.

A mighty Word mediates for you. Jesus speaks to forgive what the Law condemns. He is not afraid to get His hands dirty with our sin by the promise bestowed in baptism. Nothing is more important to Him than to remain savior. He does this so no tragedy can remove the truth of His love. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Tim 2:5-6). His Holy Sacrament nourishes with victory won by the cross to repent and believe in Him. This is powerful fertilizer filled with the life of His Sacrifice. The true body and blood of Jesus provides God’s answer to tragedy of a sinful world. He is present to turn hearts and change lives for true faith endures to trust in Him. As the Psalmist said, “Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. (Psalms 5:8).

How can you not bear fruit when God is so patient to save by His Son! The Gardner said about the fig tree after tending to it, “Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” Outside of Christ, there is no hope, no peace, and no fruit. It is one tragedy after another standing against the truth of God’s love that ends in judgment. The Jews saw this fall upon them in their rejection with the destruction of the temple by the Romans. The Gentiles have seen this hardship in various ways throughout nations when the Gospel no longer brought fruit forth in their lives. Luther is unafraid to say, “The blood of Christ kills sin; it does not make it alive, which is the work of the devil…Christ did not die so that you might remain that kind of sinner, but so that sin, having been slain, might be blotted out, and you might henceforth love God and your neighbor. Faith takes away sins and puts them to death, so that you might not live in them but in righteousness. Therefore, show by your works and your fruits that there is faith in you. If not, the blood of Christ does not help.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The baptized continue to intercede in prayer for those perishing apart from Christ. It is for the multitudes who still do not know Jesus, others who have rejected His Word of forgiveness for a life of sin, and those who have removed themselves from His Church. Lord have mercy. Provide us with the power of Your love and care hidden in the Gospel. Judgment has already fallen upon Jesus. None need perish for the promise of fruit rests by faith in His love cared for by Word and Sacrament. The Gardener acts to save the tree. The sinner must respond or face the fact that rejecting God’s Son is the greatest tragedy. Fully invested as Savior means Jesus alone brings life out of death. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. Martin Luther, *Sermon for the First Sunday after Trinity on 1 John 4:16-21.* Preached in St. Mary’s Church, Wittenberg, Germany June 7, 1545. Translated by Christopher Boyd Brown. Pr 2002; WA 49:80-87. Copyright Concordia Publishing House, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)