

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Luke 13:1-9

The Garden of Repentance

- 1. The necessity of producing fruit in this garden**
- 2. The time our gracious God gives to produce it**

Hymns: 119 – 115 – Distribution: 109, 129 – 111

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Luke 13:1-9 –

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

"You need an attitude change!"

Has anyone ever said those words to you? That phrase has been spoken countless times down through the years:

- They've been spoken by exasperated parents to one of their small children who is throwing a fit because they aren't getting what they want.

- They've been said by many a mom to a teenage daughter who is "copping an attitude" because she doesn't like a household rule.
- They've been spoken by coaches who have players on the team that don't interact or play well with their teammates.

"You need an attitude change!"

Those words are not easy to hear. For the hearer, it means that fault lies very clearly with them. They obviously are not doing something right or acting immaturely. And someone has seen this so clearly that they felt the need to say it plainly!

This Lent, as we continue our look at the series "**From Garden to Glory,**" the garden that we venture through today contains a gardener who says these very words to our face: "You need an attitude change." We hear these words from God himself. They will not be easy words for us to digest this morning, but they are words that must be spoken as we walk through the Garden of Repentance. We will learn two things as we walk through this garden today.

1. The necessity of Producing fruit in this garden

We read in Luke 13, "*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

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What exactly is Jesus saying to these people? And why?

The key verse here is: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." The word "repent" is an interesting one in the Greek language. The word is made up of two smaller words put together: CHANGE and MIND. Repentance involves a rethinking about your condition and your behavior, different from what you would naturally think. Basically, Jesus is saying to the people of his day: "You need an attitude change!"

Why would Jesus tell them this? It's interesting that at the end of the previous chapter in Luke, Jesus criticized them for not being able to interpret the "signs of the times." He taught them that as sure as coming clouds in the west meant rain, the signs of the times in this world point to the impending judgment of God that will certainly come. He urged them to be reconciled on the way to court before facing the judge!

At that point, our sermon text begins with certain reporters bringing up the fact that Pontius Pilate had done an atrocious thing to Jewish Galileans. They had been making sacrifices to the Lord and Pilate murdered them and mixed their blood with their own sacrifices! Jesus knew they had brought this up as an attempt to deflect their own guilt. Sure, Jesus had warned them of God's impending judgment and accused them of not being reconciled before the judge, but at least they didn't fall prey to the disaster and tragedy that Pilate had done! They must certainly be doing OK, since they weren't murdered like those Galileans.

Jesus' words speak very clearly about the necessity for them to repent, not deflecting the blame and guilt away from themselves, but to own up to their own sinfulness. *"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

Jesus brings up another tragedy that we are not told about anywhere else in Scripture or in history. A tower in Siloam, which would have been in the southeast section of Jerusalem's

wall, had fallen and killed eighteen people. "What about those killed by the tower in that tragedy?" Jesus asked. Did they think they were better than those "sinners" because they suffered that great disaster but they themselves had escaped it? *"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

We can relate to disasters and tragedies. The hurricane in New Orleans, the storm on the shores of New York and New Jersey, the tsunami in Japan, crashes, earthquakes, deaths, and more are in the news regularly. And regularly people speculate, "What did those people do, that God would allow tragedy to happen to them?"

There certainly are times when we can pin specific disasters on specific sinful actions, but what does Jesus say about these general events? They do not have to do with anyone being "worse sinners." They were simply results of general sin in a corrupt world. Such events serve as a reminder of sinfulness and unworthiness before God and the fact that we all are going to have to go stand before him someday and give an account.

For those who refuse to have a "change of mind" in their sinful condition and actions, a greater disaster looms. The word that Jesus uses for "you will all perish" is very strong. It means to be utterly destroyed and killed. It carries the strong connotation of coming to a tragic end and lost to eternal misery. Utter ruin lies ahead. The picture in Jesus' parable about the frustrated gardener who is ready to cut down the tree that will not produce fruit is clear.

Therefore, as we walk through the Garden of Repentance today and hear about the fruit of repentance, it is a fitting day for us to honestly examine our hearts. It is a fitting day to honestly confess what we see there. We live in a day and age where people try to "soften" situations that are not optimum. Simple terminology has changed in many ways. No longer do you buy a used car; it's a pre-owned vehicle. Don't call someone "short"; they are simply vertically challenged. And I had to chuckle at our grade school's Academics Fair

this past Thursday when one of the principals told competitors that winners in each round would move one direction; “non-winners” (not losers) would move rotate the other direction!

However, when it comes to spiritual matters, attempting to soften our guilt will do nothing but deceive us. Guilt cannot be downplayed by saying:

- Other people are doing worse things.
- The devil made me do it!
- I was a victim of bad company.
- I had a bad upbringing.
- I simply made a poor choice.
- I have a poor environment.
- You should have seen what was done to me first.
- We’re all sinners.

And just like those in Jesus’ audience long ago, there is the damning feeling that “all is well” because the sun is shining on me today, because repercussions didn’t fall upon my head the last time I did that, or my life seems pretty prosperous. Confession comes hard! Yet true repentance says, “I did it. I have no excuse. And I throw my wretched self on the mercy of God’s court!”

However, when the fruit of repentance is borne in God’s garden, worked by the power of the Holy Spirit, a blessed result occurs, for this is what Lent is all about. Jesus took upon himself the punishment that we rightly had coming from God. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, God aimed all of his divine wrath at him. And through his death, God’s justice on the human race was served. Now God declares you and me and all people forgiven in Christ. Through Christ, repentant sinners receive his forgiveness. Even tragedies have a new light. Tragedies are not punishments, but are changed into God’s loving governance for our good. As we rely on Jesus, we are comforted that God has nothing but loving intentions toward us. Even in death itself, we find but a sleep from which we will awake one day and rise up from our graves to live with Christ forever in paradise.

How can we know this? God himself meets me through his Word, whether written in the

Bible or spoken. The message of forgiveness shines through as you read it. The pastor proclaims and preaches it as he teaches from the Word each week. Baptism assures you of it. Your sins have been washed away in Christ. The Lord’s Supper comforts you with it. The body and blood that you receive when you take communion is the visible gospel that assures you of the forgiveness of sin. You are loved by God forever. Believe it!

This season of Lent, perhaps there is a special way that you can produce this fruit of repentance. We see it in the penitential color of purple in our services. Perhaps you experienced it in the ashes of Ash Wednesday. Is there quiet time that you can plan for this season so you can reflect regularly on your sin and God’s grace? Is there extra time for prayers of confession in the season of Lent? And how about using the seven Penitential Psalms in your Bible reading each week? Maybe you could read one per day each week during Lent, even committing them to memory. Such practices help us to produce the fruit that God requires in this garden.

2. The time our gracious God gives to produce it

We can’t leave our walk through this garden of God today without one other thought, the thought that Jesus closes his parable with. The man who took care of the master’s vineyard said of the unfruitful tree, *“Sir, leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”*

Jesus told something on a completely different line of thought at the end of his story. The master of the vineyard is unhappy and frustrated. He has been coming to this vineyard for three years looking for fruit on this tree. The sense of the verb is repeated action. He has come again and again in the hopes of finding fruit. But there has been none. And he has had enough. It is no snap decision he makes. The tree should be cut down. It is wasting the ground it is planted in and is not serving the purpose of its kind of tree. Then the patient assistant comes into the story. He asks

for one more year. He promises to give special treatment to this tree and not to give up on it.

What is Jesus' lesson? The Lord has patience as he looks for fruit. He waits for repentance. 2 Peter 3 says, *"The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* Ezekiel 33:11 has quite an impassioned plea when the Lord says, *"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"* He wants repentance to come!

What are our thoughts as we hear these words? We certainly have thoughts about our own repentance. Our thoughts are not about procrastinating, putting repentance off, or testing God's patience. Our thoughts are:

- Thank you, Lord, that you have been patient with me
- Each day is yet another day to repent
- Each day is another blessed day to be assured of God's forgiveness
- Each day is another day to serve him with my life and abilities

Yet there's more. When we hear about the patience of the Lord, we also have thoughts about others. First, we will fervently pray that all people around us and in our world would repent and believe in the Savior of the world who died for their sins too. Many are wandering in the unbelief of sin and stubbornly resisting God's Word today. There still is time!

This will also have an effect on our witnessing. Our words to others about what is right and wrong, along with the clear message of our need to repent, are vital. This Lent offers you another great opportunity to speak to those around you who don't follow God's ways. Invite them to one of our contemplative Wednesday services for supper and for worship. Invite them to one of our Sunday services, perhaps Easter Sunday. Come with them to the new *Bible Basics Course* that just started on Thursdays as of last week. The Lord is patient.

But one day the time of grace will be past and the day of judgment will arrive for them.

What lessons we have seen on this walk through the Garden of Repentance! It was by a garden that the first sin entered the world. And it is in a garden today that Jesus instructs of the need to repent. May God work such repentance in us today, during Lent, and beyond! Amen.