

“Seeking Fruit”

The words that Jesus speaks to the people of His day – He speaks to you and to me. We are no different. We too live with a “worse sinners” mentality. Jesus hears the people’s report of “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” – and He knows exactly what they are thinking.

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?” “Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that there were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?”

That’s what we think. When tragedies fall upon other people – there is a part of us that wonders if they are just getting what they deserve – that they were “worse sinners.” And we think the opposite is also true. When “life is good” for others – we think that they are somehow “better” – that God is more pleased with them.

The world around us is full of tragic events that should get our attention – but they are so common we hardly even notice. The picture of the crumbling tower on today’s bulletin cover screams “danger.” Even the little squirrel pictured on the children’s bulletin should run away – because if you listen to the Scripture reading, he is in danger of being covered with manure.

God’s Word in our hearing today is full of warnings. In the Old Testament reading, the watchman is told that when you see the sword coming – you’d better blow the trumpet – you better warn the wicked of the danger coming their way – or their blood will be upon your hand.

In the Epistle, the Apostle Paul recounts the history of Israel in the wilderness. They were blessed – they all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea – they all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink – Christ the Rock was with them – “nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

“Now these things took place as EXAMPLES for us” – for US – for you and for me. “Now these things happened to them as an EXAMPLE, but they were written down for OUR instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

And if that were not enough, Jesus Himself warns us. The Parable of the Fig Tree is for us. “Sir, let [the fig tree] alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

Folks, are you paying attention? Do you have ears to hear? Or are you just trudging through life as if God is not a part of it?

God has sent me to tell you that you’d better pay attention. He has given me to be a watchman – to sound the alarm, to blow the trumpet – to give you fair warning.

The Galileans killed by Pilate, and the eighteen killed by the falling tower – were not “worse sinners” or “worse offenders” than YOU. “No, I tell you; but unless YOU repent, you will all likewise perish.” Repent, or the day will come when the Lord will cut you down.

In the Parable of the Fig Tree – you are the fig tree that the Lord has planted in His Vineyard (the Church). Don’t misunderstand what He is saying. This parable is not just about the Last Day when the Lord Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead – it is about all of your days. For years the Lord has come looking for fruit, and He “found none.”

And what is the fruit the Lord is looking for? Well, in the parable, it’s obvious – He’s looking for the fig tree to bear the fruit of figs! But it’s not really about a fig tree and figs – its about YOU and the fruit He seeks to find you bearing.

You are a Christian – so He expects, and looks for, Christian fruit. Jesus comes to you looking for the fruit of repentance – faith – and good works. “As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Folks, when the Lord calls you to repent – He is not just saying that He wants you to admit that you have done wrong, to confess your sin – the call is to “turn back.” Don’t you see where your sin leads? To death. Turn back and live.

To sin against God and what He desires for you is not just wicked, and evil, and unjust – it’s dangerous, it harms yourself and others – it’s deadly. As Lutherans, we confess in the Formula of Concord that – “To repent means nothing other than to truly acknowledge sins, to be heartily sorry for them, and to stop doing them.” (FC SD V 8)

Rebelling against God and His will for your life is “not good” – it’s not the good life that God desires for you, and for all people. He does want you to receive all the blessings He promises and offers to you. He does want you to live, and not die (eternally).

But it is not your fruit that you turn to and trust in. Do not trust in your righteous deeds. Rather, fix your eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” – to redeem YOU the sinner – to give you life, rather than the death your sin deserves.

That’s why Jesus comes to you today – warning you – digging around and putting manure on – so that you might turn back from your sin, and in faith turn to Him who blots out all your iniquity, giving you life.

Jesus, who endured the cross “for you” – comes and gives His Body and Blood to you today – for the forgiveness of all your sin. He comes to put on you His righteousness so that your sin is remembered no more.

Dearly beloved, let us fix our eyes on Jesus who endured the cross for us – so that His death might bear the fruit of repentance, faith, and good works – even unto life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.