

3rd Sunday in Lent.
Luke 13,1-9
Gospel: Luke 13:1-9.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Luke 13:1-9.

1 At that time some people were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way. 4 Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were? 5 I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.”

6 Jesus told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree that had been planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 He told the man who worked the vineyard, ‘Look here! For the last three years I have been coming here looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have not been finding any. Therefore cut it down! Why does it keep using up the ground?’

8 “However, the man answered him, ‘Sir, allow it to stand this year also, until I dig around it and put fertiliser on it! 9 If the tree bears fruit in future, fine. However, if it does not, you will cut it down.’”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

Theirs no doubt about it we live in a dangerous world. Every day the headlines tell us of the evil in the world. Nature is dangerous and people are definitely dangerous. We don't even need the Bible to tell us this. We can learn this from our own experience.

The danger of nature is obvious. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanos, hurricanes, tornadoes, cyclones, bush fires, and so on all threaten lives around the world. Yes, there is the beauty of sunsets and sunrises, the stars in the sky, views from mountaintops and ocean beaches, and so on, but nature also has its violent side as well ... a violent side that brings pain and death, floods and destruction to many.

The human race is just as bad. Every day we learn about murder and mayhem on the individual level as well as the level of conflicts and wars between nations. Gunman, bombers, and knife wielding lunatics who attack schools, shopping centres, train stations, buses, houses of worship and neighbourhoods. The depravity of the human race is something that is obvious just from experience.

In this morning's Gospel, we heard about some people who came to Jesus with this exact same problem of evil in the world. **There were some present at that very time who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.** These people wanted Jesus to explain why God allows such evil in this world. Instead of bringing comfort to them, Jesus brought another example to their attention. He answered them, **“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way. 4 Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were? 5 I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.”** Jesus was telling them that, sooner or later, everyone will come to the end of his time in this world. It might be sudden like these people, or it might come after a long life. Either way, if you come to that end without repentance, you will perish eternally. The implication is that with repentance ... that is with the faith that trusts in God's promises of the forgiveness of sins, you will be ready for such tragedies.

Many people wonder why God allows such evil in this world. In fact, many people insist that the existence of evil is inconsistent with the God of the Bible. A God who loves would hate evil and want to get rid of it. A God who is almighty would have the resources to rid the world of evil. So, if God is almighty and loving, then

there should be no evil. The evil in the world suggests that if God is almighty, then He doesn't care, or if He does care and evil bothers Him, then He can't be almighty. In either case, this does not match the Bible's description of God.

The answer to this problem comes in several parts. The first part is to realize that God is not the source of evil. The Bible clearly states that "God saw all that He had made and, indeed, it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. [Genesis 1:31.] God created a good earth and gave it to us as a home. However, we soon discover that the first people, Adam and Eve, fell into sin. When they fell, they broke God's perfect creation. They let evil into the world and they passed that evil down to us through all our generations. As the Holy Spirit spoke through the Apostle Paul, **"Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."** [Romans 5:12.]

The Bible also teaches that when Adam and Eve sinned, they didn't just mess up the human race, but they also messed up creation. The Lord God Himself said to Adam, **"Because you have listened to what your wife has said and have eaten from the tree about which I had commanded you, 'You shall not eat from it!' the ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it through painful toil all the days of your life. 18 It will cause both thorns and thistles to grow for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 You will eat bread in the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground. For you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."** [Genesis 3:17-19.] These words explain the reason that nature fights our efforts. These words teach that even the disasters of nature are the result of the rebellion of humanity.

Any reasonable person will see that the God described in the Bible is not the source of evil in the world. Instead, it's the creatures that God created that are the source of evil ... first the fallen angels, and then, Adam and Eve. But this causes us to ask another question. Why did God create beings who could be so evil? Why didn't He make us so that we could never sin?

The answer to this question actually shows us a God of love. The God who is love created us with the ability to enjoy the blessings of love as well. The thing about love is that it cannot exist without free will. For genuine love to exist, there must be the possibility of rejection.

Suppose God had created us with no choice, but to do what He commanded. Then we would be like machines running computer programs. A clever computer programmer could write a program that would give this machine the appearance of love ... the appearance that it really cared for others. Of course the machine wouldn't really love anyone. It would just be executing code. The love would not be real. In fact, the machine wouldn't have a choice. It would simply be following its programming. That's not real love. God didn't create robots. He created us in His image. The God who is love created us with the ability to love. Therefore, He created us with free will ... a free will that can fail us sometimes. An almighty God of love is consistent with the existence of evil ... on the basis of the free will ... we need ... in order to experience love. The Bible teaches exactly that ... that God created us with the ability to love, but we used the free will ... that comes with love ... to do evil instead. The evil in the world does not indicate that God does not love us. Instead, it shows that it is the human race who has rejected God's love and chosen evil instead.

But then the question becomes, "Is that it? Is there no more? Are human beings doomed because they used their free will to sin instead of love?" Here is where the God of love transcends the evil choices of His creatures.

Even though He already knew that we would rebel, He still created us. He already had a plan in place to save us from our own evil choices. Even though we are sinners, God sent His only begotten Son to die for us as the Apostle Paul said, **"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** [Romans 5:8.]

The natural consequences of our evil would have destroyed the human race long ago. Our own evil should have caused our own extinction, but God put His plan of salvation into effect. He limited the consequences of sin until the time was right for Him to send His Own Son to take up our human flesh and take our place under the judgment of the law.

Jesus, as both true God and true man, took the eternal consequences of our sin onto Himself and He suffered the punishment for them as He hung on the cross and died for us. As the Apostle Peter said, **"For you know**

that you have not been redeemed with perishable things, with silver or gold, from the worthless lives you had handed over to you from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless and unblemished lamb." [1 Peter 1:18,19.] Through Jesus, God the Father not only relieved us of our eternal suffering, but He has also assured us of eternal life. For Jesus did not remain in the grave after He died on the cross, but He returned to life in an immortal body.

In this resurrection, God has given us eternal life as He promised through the Apostle Paul, "**However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. 22 For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the firstfruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ.**" [1 Corinthians 15:20-23.]

Not only has God given us eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ, but He has also transformed the evil consequences of this world. In the parable of the fig tree, the vinedresser pleaded with the landowner, "**Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.**" [Luke 13:8-9.] The evil things of this world, like digging around the root and applying manure, discipline us and make us stronger. God transforms them from curses into gifts for our blessing.

Just as the gardener worked with the tree in the parable, God the Holy Spirit also works with us. He overcomes the evil in this world and uses it to strengthen us. He works to produce repentance and faith in us. That faith receives the gift of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus earned for us. Jesus earned that forgiveness when He suffered and died for us on the cross. Jesus allowed all those bad things to happen to Him so that He could give His good things to us. Through His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. **Amen**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church Third Sunday in Lent

P People loved by God, let us come before our Father's throne of grace with confidence through our Lord Jesus and, in the power of His Spirit, ask His mercy for all in need

Brief silence.

P Merciful Father, Your salvation is near to those who fear You. Look in kindness upon Your whole Church and pour out on Your family the gift of repentance that all Your children might be given grace continually to heed Your Word, - turn from sin, - and find forgiveness and life in Your Son. - Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Giver of salvation, remember the places where we teach and learn Your Word, look in mercy upon this congregation, and all congregations of the AELC and the ULMA. Kind and loving Lord, bless our pastors and their families and church workers, that they may be faithful and their service fruitful. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Almighty KING, to You we commend all who have been entrusted with authority in our land, For those who make, administer and judge our laws; for the causes of peace and justice, here and throughout the world; for those in the armed forces who protect and defend us against our enemies; for laws that are good and just and for judges who are wise and faithful, for those who care for the sick and injured, especially doctors, nurses, technicians, and all medical workers, the police the SES and fire brigades, that they carry out their calling with joy and dedication as they seek to preserve life and care for all, protect them from evil and guide them in paths that are pleasing to You. Lord in Your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P O Lord, You tell us in Your Word that You do not willingly afflict the sons of men. Hear our prayers for all Your children who are suffering or in need, the lonely and afflicted, the grieving and the dying [especially remembering Your servants]. Comfort troubled their hearts with the promises of Your Word, surround them with Your angels to protect them in body and soul, and grant them a happy release from their afflictions according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Loving God, You do not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but in trial You always provide the way of escape for us to bear it. Remember in pity all those whose faith is put to the test, who struggle with

addictions, who feel abandoned, those who can only see troubles. Open the eyes of their spirit to sense You near them and let them find in Your Word and Sacrament the relief for which they beg. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Father of our Lord Jesus, Your Son has prepared for His family a feast, that we might not grow weary in the struggle, or despair of Your mercy, but find constant renewal. Grant to all who come to the Holy altar this day repentant hearts and firm trust in the promise of the Saviour, that here they will receive with His body and blood, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of a life that death cannot take away. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**