

We're approaching the halfway point of our Lenten journey. The hazy, lazy days of Jesus' ministry in Galilee are quickly beginning to pale under the shadow of the Cross, looming before us.

The reading from Luke today doesn't make it clear where Jesus is at this point of the journey, but he's on his way to Jerusalem.

Maybe he's already there, perhaps teaching on the Mount of Olives. It was a popular spot for Galileans to pitch their tents when on pilgrimage to the holy city.

Luke begins by saying, "Now there were some present at the same time..." (Luke 13:1) Presumably, it was a friendly audience. Unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees who often tried to trick him, those gathered here seem to be honest, would-be followers of Jesus.

Their question was heart-felt. They wanted to know what he thought about a recent incident in the temple.

It seems a group of Galileans had been massacred by Herod's soldiers in the very act of offering their sacrifices to God. The slaughter took place on the temple grounds. It's hard to imagine a more heinous act. Being from Galilee, it's possible those asking the question knew some of the ones who'd been murdered.

Was Jesus that cold and callous? Was he that indifferent to such atrocities of life? Perhaps there's a part of the story we're not getting. Perhaps Jesus was distraught over the news and overcome with emotion, and it was only after he regained his composure that he went on to ask them this question. Luke doesn't say. Instead, he crops the picture tightly and focuses solely on Jesus' reply:

**“Unless you repent,  
you will all perish in the same way.”**

What follows is a similar incident only, this time, it's Jesus who brings it up.

It seems a tower overlooking the Pool of Siloam had fallen, killing eighteen innocent bystanders down below. Whether it was due to shoddy construction or overcrowding on the upper deck, or the ground shifting underneath the foundation, Luke doesn't say.

All we know is that that it fell, and eighteen people died as a result. So, Jesus asked his followers,

“Or those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them; do you think that they were worse offenders than all the men who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.” (Luke 13:4-5)

Again, Jesus seems unsympathetic, and this isn't how we like to think of him. But rather than dwell on his emotions – or lack thereof – let's focus on the point he made, for, in both instances, his message was clear: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

What this says is that we live in a fallen and broken world. Whether by the hand of a tyrant or the force of nature, terrible things happen and, when they do, innocent people suffer and die. Today we know all too well the horrors of the war in Ukraine, but there are forces of nature too, tornadoes, earthquakes and tsunamis.

Whether we die a natural death or by the hand of a terrorist or by a bolt of lightning, the end result is the same – we die. One way or the other, we're all born to die. The saying goes that two things in life are certain, taxes and death. The question is whether or not we choose to live, and what Jesus makes clear is that the only way to live – really live, – is to repent – to turn to God and seek God's will for your life; to lose your life in devotion to Christ and, in so doing, discover life in all its abundance.

“Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.” It's a warning and a promise: If you repent, you'll experience life in all its abundance, just as John 3:16 says:

“For God so loved the world,  
that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish,  
but have eternal life.”

If you don't repent, you'll die – which is not necessarily to say you'll stop breathing, but that you'll never experience the fullness of life God has in store for you. You'll always fall short. You'll never be satisfied and content with what

you have. Plus, you'll be consumed by bitterness and anger, worry and anxiety, pettiness and strife.

**“Unless you repent,  
you will all perish in the same way.”**

To repent is to change, and I don't know why, but we resist that like The Plague.

You know the old adage:

How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb? And the answer is: Change? Not surprisingly, when it comes to change, we do our best to circumvent it any way we can.

I confess I am ok with some changes, and I struggle with others.

Sometimes, to avoid change, we take an active approach. We do every good work imaginable. We go to church; we read the Bible; we serve on committees; we participate in village events; we even pray and read devotional literature. We do all these things, but, at the end of the day, we're just as set in our ways as ever. It's as if we're immune to change.

It's a paradox: The more we invite change, the more we stay the same. It's like “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.” It gives the appearance of change while doing nothing to address the underlying problem deep down below.

We are going to be facing changes when Jonathan (our Rector) and Dawn and his family leave us next week. It maybe that we will struggle for a while as we adjust to all the changes.

Those changes will primarily be practical ones but what we need to be about is truth that leads to change.

Unless we are we're just going in circles. We're like the fig tree in the little parable Jesus told his followers. He said,

**“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard,  
and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none.  
He said to the vine dresser,  
'Behold, these three years  
I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and found none.**

Cut it down. Why does it waste the soil?’  
He answered, ‘Lord, leave it alone this year also,  
until I dig around it, and fertilize it.  
If it bears fruit, fine;  
but if not, after that, you can cut it down.’” (Luke 13:6-9)

Now David and I don’t argue very often but we have one thing that causes lets  
say a difference of opinions every year in the Autumn.

We have a fig tree in the garden which we inherited from the previous  
occupants. It was quite small 6 years ago but now it has got a mind of it’s own.  
It has only ever born one solitary fig and I keep saying to David cut it down. But  
he wants it to grow so that it will bear more fruit. So I gave it and this is the  
height to which it has grown.....and it was with much triumph that David  
pointed out that it has doubled it’s fruit yield!! Actually it’s last tears growth  
that didn’t grow and mature. It’s quite a biblical lesson our tree.

Jesus didn’t say what happened – whether the fig tree bore fruit the next year  
or not, but the message was clear: If it didn’t, it would be toast.

“Unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.” God calls us to turn  
from the ways of the world and walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

God calls us to embrace in our own lives – and proclaim to others – a truth that  
leads to change.