



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 20, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Numbers 16:23-40](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 38

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 13:1-9](#)

### **Marks of the Messiah: He Calls Us to Repentance**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Over the course of my years in the ministry I spend time visiting people that are going through physical challenges, at the hospital, at home, in recovery, in rehab, at various times and in various places. One of the things I have noticed about people (okay, maybe primarily males but I've seen it in both genders) is that when a doctor comes and tells us to do something because it will be good for us, you can almost guarantee it's going in one ear and out the other because we know better. "It's not going to be that way for me." "I can handle this." "That's not how it is." The other thing I've noticed is when some of the things are told to other people, those same people (me included) that won't listen when it's about "me" will say "You should be doing that! That's obvious." We don't always like to listen to those directions from our doctors on what it is going to be that is going to help us out of whatever is challenging us.

I remember in Minnesota I visited one of my farmers three times as he had a knee replaced. He was fine as soon as the knee was replaced. He was back out in the barn and soon they were replacing it again. We're kind of stubborn, or foolish, take your choice. They both fit at times.

I think our God knows that. I think that's why He speaks so directly in Scripture about our need, not to focus on what someone else should be doing about their sins but on what "I" should be doing about "my" sins. I think that's the point of Jesus' interaction with those people today.

It's all about the individual Christian repenting of their sins and recognizing what their sins are. This is His called repentance. He doesn't call us to repent or judge the sins of others and say "Their sins are worse than mine." He calls each of us to look at ourselves and turn to Him for repentance. I'll grant you that He has told us to teach and admonish one another. But you can't do that until you start with yourself. That's what this is all about.

Jesus is in the northern part of the children of Israel and He is on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Last week we heard about the interchange about Herod, "Go tell that Fox..." and those kinds of things. That was later in this chapter. These events take place beforehand. He had just told the people that He had not come to bring peace but division. People's relationship to Him would cause division. It would turn family members against each other. Everything in life for eternal life is going to depend on what your relationship is to the Messiah/Jesus. Because so many people will reject Him and turn away from Him, that's where He is talking about the division coming in. He comes to bring peace between us and God, but one of the results of that peace between believers and God is that those who have turned their back on Jesus view believers with suspicion perhaps.

Then He had told them, "You can tell through the signs in nature. If this wind blows, there is a storm coming. If these things are happening in the trees, that means Spring is coming. You can read all those signs, but you can't read the spiritual signs that are around you because otherwise you would recognize from what is going on and what I have been teach and what I have been doing; how I've been revealing myself as the Messiah. You'd know that this is everything Scripture has been pointing to, but you can't see the spiritual signs." That's immediately what happened right before what I just read to you. So it sounds like some of these people are now going to say "You think we can't read the spiritual signs? I can read the spiritual signs. What about those Galileans that were killed in the temple when they were offering their sacrifices? Spiritual sign; they had to be awful if something like that happened to them! They had to be way worse than I am! There, trumped you Jesus. I can see the spiritual signs."

That's kind of like the spiritual signs that we often see today. We're really good at talking about how terrible the world is and how things in the world are so much worse than they were before. We're really good at these spiritual signs that are out there, but the ones that are in the mirror every morning, we aren't quite as good at those. And that is Jesus' point. We all need to be looking in the mirror more.

So do you think those people that were killed when they were offering their sacrifices are more sinful than anyone else? No! Everyone is sinful. If you don't repent and have this connection to God, things worse than what happened to those guys are going to happen to you. That's Jesus' message.

Then He takes it a step farther. "Before you say that, now you're going to bring up the people in Jerusalem that the tower fell on and killed them, the tower of Siloam. Do you think they were worse? I tell you no! Unless YOU repent, a worse fate than that is going to befall YOU!" You need to see that all sins condemn us to hell. Don't be Job's friends.

Remember Job's friends and the terrible advice they gave? "You must have done something so terrible because God is letting this into your life. You must be a worse sinner than I am because it hasn't happened to me and it has happened to you, so just fess up, Job." That's the same thing these guys were saying to Jesus here. As bad as Job's friends were, the same thing is in these guys, and the same thing is in us. We do the same thing. We like to rank sins.

When we talk to people after church and we gossip, "That's not a big deal. That's no big deal. We shouldn't worry about gossip. It's not like we invaded Ukraine, so God is not upset with this." When we aren't all that excited about who our God is or what He has done for us so that we don't make time for Him and we don't make a priority for Him, "I still love Him. I just don't have time for Him." We don't think that's as bad a sin as some of the sins someone else might commit. God is clearly trying to reach out to us and says, "Look at your life and see your sin because you need to be connected to Jesus." Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem not because it would be a great three-day vacation. He was on His way to Jerusalem because you and I are filthy, rotten sinners and we have nothing to offer God. The things we make excuses for are the things that nailed Jesus to the cross. The things that we think aren't that bad caused our God to leave heaven and come to this earth and live perfectly because we don't even care about living perfectly, and we CAN'T do it. So He comes and He does it in our place. Then He takes all of our sins on His back and He allows Himself to die for the punishment of our sins. And the devil has convinced us at times to be so familiar with that that we yawn at it as though "Yeah, you should do that for me. I deserve that." Oh, what fools we are!

We turn God's incredible underserved love into something that we think is there just to enable us to do whatever we want without any concern whether God wants us to do it or not. We can just follow the whims of our sinful desires and then just say "Gee Lord, I'm sorry." God today is calling us to look at our lives and turn away from our sin and look to Him.

What He tells us today is that He looks for that in His people. Those who believe in Him, He looks for them to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. He does not look for His people to try to transform who God is and what He has said is right and wrong. He looks for His people to be transformed by the renewing of their minds through the constant use of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacrament, to grow in their faith and their love for a God who loved them first and took away the guilt of their sins.

Now in response to that incredible gift of forgiveness that we could never earn or deserve, He says "I'm looking for you to produce fruit." That's the point of the parable. Jesus isn't really concerned about figs. He is using that as an earthly story to say "This is what I'm looking for in my people." The fig tree really is every individual Christian. The gardener is God. He says "I gave you this gift of faith. I've said to live in view of God's mercy and offer your bodies as living sacrifices. It doesn't save you but it's your response to this salvation." If you hand yourself over to sin again and again and again and again and without any thought to it, it's going to choke out faith. It's going to be like the tree that is planted there and for three years the guy comes and continues looking for fruit and there isn't any fruit. Did you notice God's response? "Cut it down!"

That kind of tells us God is on His own timetable. He is looking for results in the lives of Christians. He can see when those lacking in results mean that they are no longer Christian. Then the gardener, which in this case would be Jesus I suppose, says "Let me tend to it for another year and if it doesn't produce fruit, then cut it down." Again, it points us to a certain timetable.

God takes sin seriously. We see that in the First Lesson today. Korah, Dathan and Abiram; God had told through Moses and Aaron when God gave the Laws for their worship life on Mount Sinai that only the descendants of Aaron and his descendants were supposed to offer incense in the tabernacle. Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their followers said "Hey, you guys aren't better than we are! We're all God's people. I think we should be able to go too. Moses, you're just trying to keep this to yourself." They weren't recognizing that what Moses had said was the Word of God. They attacked the messenger. They said "We're all holy. We can all do it!" So Moses says "Go ahead. Tomorrow here is what we will do—you guys offer the incense and we'll see what the Lord says about this." So those 250 people and the charred censers and all that, those were the people that were offering the incense when the fire of the Lord came out of the tabernacle and destroyed them. The earth opened and swallowed that.

Then here is what happened the next day—how God's people, how we, as God's people, and the Israelites, as God's people, often don't learn from the lessons the Lord is trying to teach us. As word spread through the camp and all the Israelites started hearing about this, the next day a bunch of them gathered and said "Moses and Aaron, what you did isn't right! You killed these people!" Not "God did." "You did!" We're told that a plague broke out among the people and 17,400 of them died because they attacked, not God's representatives, but God viewed it as an attack on Himself. They continued to die until Moses had Aaron go and put the incense in the tabernacle and among the people as an offering to take away the Lord's anger. That was 17,400 people.

Isn't it interesting how God keeps track of those numbers? Not 17,000 but 17,400 it says in Numbers. It's interesting because God pays attention. God is concerned about whether or not we're producing fruit. When we don't produce fruit, there comes a time

when He says "That's it! You're accountable. You're accountable!" He knows when that faith is lost and He says, "Repent," which repent (again, remember this) means not just to turn away from the sin but to turn to trust that God has taken away that sin (for them, the promised Messiah to come) (for you and me, we know who that is). It's a turning away from sin and a turning to Christ as the payment for that sin.

God wants us in connection with Him. He wants us to make use of the means of grace so that we don't lose our faith. He tells us if we aren't tending that tree that is our faith, it can be cut down and lost for all eternity.

Paul told us in our Second Lesson to learn from these warnings. Don't be the guy that goes to the doctor and says "That doesn't apply to me." See how important it is for you, yourself, to be connected to Jesus through repentance, acknowledging your sin, not making excuses for it. Your sins that you think are big and your sins that you think are little—see that they ALL condemn you. Then see in Christ the payment for them all. Then have the same kind of love that Jesus has that says "I know I can't repent for anyone else but I can encourage them to stay close to Jesus because I love them and I want them in heaven with me." That's the only reason Jesus came to earth, so that people can be in heaven with Him. It was THAT important that He left perfection. If we are His people, it's important to us also. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.**