



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
www.mzluth.org

March 23, 2025
3rd Sunday in Lent

Pastor James Enderle

First Lesson: [Exodus 3:1-15](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 85A

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

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

OPEN DOOR POLICIES
Always Present, Always Patient
THE TRUTH IN TRAGEDY

1. **Bad:** By nature we think _____
2. **Good:** We think about _____ and _____
3. **Bad:** We are stubborn _____
4. **Good:** God is _____ and _____

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.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

If you're like me, you've stopped watching the evening news and don't really like to turn on the news online because you know that there is bad news all the time. That's what people like to show and they like to push, but there are certain things, there are certain tragedies that happen that you can't avoid knowing about, learning about, hearing about and you being concerned about.

If you go back a generation, you can think about when JFK was shot. My generation remembers exactly where we were at 9-11. I was a senior in high school. But there is a generation now that wasn't even born or doesn't remember 9-11, that tragedy. You can think of other tragedies you hear of—all the school shootings or Hurricane Katrina, the huge flooding in New Orleans. Then we had a hurricane this last year in North Carolina, and there was so much devastation that happened there. We saw the pictures and you can't help but hearing and seeing about it. There were the fires in California, around Los Angeles, that were such a tragedy. It's hard not to see, but we know that there is tragedy all around and we wonder why it happens. There are times when we see these tragedies and people will question and say "Why does this happen?" Sometimes they'll try to give an answer.

Today we are going to look at **the truth in tragedy**. But the problem is that sometimes people think that they know the truth. I did relief work down in New Orleans three times. I was down there ten weeks after, six months after, two years after Hurricane Katrina, and I remember people saying "That hurricane/devastation came to New Orleans because they have Bourbon Street and there are such sinful people down in New Orleans." Can you remember that? We also had the flooding in North Carolina and the fires in LA. I heard things like, "LA, that's Hollywood and those rich people. They are getting that punishment they deserve." I didn't really hear that about North Carolina. Why do we sometimes project it onto THESE people and not THOSE people? God hasn't revealed why something is happening and some say "They are getting that because of this," but we know that's a problem. We know that's not revealed by God. So then we have to ask, what is **the truth in tragedy**?

As we look at the questions asked to Jesus, there is a first part that we are going to look at about the wrong thoughts that we have and then the good thoughts we should have. In the second part, we are going to see how Jesus connects the questions to a parable. We are going to see a bad truth and then a good truth.

First we see here in these tragedies that there are signs. There are signs of something. If you look at the context of [Chapter 13](#), it's always good to remember that when the Bible was written, they didn't have the chapter breaks and the verse numbers, so in [Chapters 11 and 12](#), Jesus is talking about signs that He is the Son of God, and people are kind of ignoring those signs, that He is the Messiah. They see the signs but don't believe them. There are also signs of the end of the world. What are going to be the signs that the end is coming. Then, it kind of relates to this question—what are these tragedies signs of?

People come to Jesus with these two examples. The one example is where Pilate mixed the blood of Galileans with the sacrifices and the other, when a tower fell in Siloam and killed 18 people. We don't know the exact examples of these. We know that Pilate had other examples where he was pretty ruthless, where he put down rebellion and actually lost some of his rule because of some of his harshness. But we kind of see the two different types of tragedy. The tower falling was just an accident. Why does this horrible accident happen, and why does this horrendous, evil thing happen?—like in our world, the school shootings or the wars.

People come to Jesus and say, "Why is this happening?" What is the natural thought? Jesus knows the natural thought. We don't hear the words that the people are thinking, but Jesus gives us what they are thinking. He says, "***Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no!***" And the second one: "***Do you think that they (the people who the tower fell on) were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!***" The **bad**, natural thought that we have, **by nature we think karma**. This is what the people of religions thousands of years ago thought, but this is also what we

continue to think today. It's that natural thing that we fall into, that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people. *If that's what is happening, they must have done something to deserve it. And if life is going pretty good for me or for these people, that means we must be pretty good people.* Do we know that's not exactly how God works? We do, but is that what we default to?

This horrible thing happens, this tragedy, this sad thing happens, and we think *what did they do that God has brought that into their life?* This is what we naturally do. This is what our hearts do. We have this natural feeling that we should get what we deserve and *if I am not getting punishment or having bad things happen, then I must be a good person. And those people must be bad because they are getting bad things.* Or even when a disaster/terrible thing happens in your life, maybe you think, *what did I do, God? Why are you punishing me? Why are you letting this happen? What did I do wrong?* But is that the point? Is that what God is saying tragedy is all about? No! He's not saying that people who suffer in these ways are more guilty, are worse sinners. This is the wrong thought.

So what is the good thought? He says not that they are more guilty or they are more of a sinner, he says, ***"But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*** So what is the **good** thought that God wants us to think about? He wants us to **think about sin and death**. He is not saying you should look down on those people or you should look at yourself more highly if things are going well, but you should think about sin. You should think about what causes death and brings about tragedy in life, and that we all, one day, will meet our end. Maybe not in a tragedy, but sin and death are real. So He says you, too, should repent, to use this to understand that in tragedy, we are to be reminded that our lives are not forever. We are not going to live forever and that we are sinful and need to repent and understand that sin causes everyone to die. No one is going to escape death. So this is what tragedy should cause in us, not to condemn those people but to look at ourselves and understand that we are mortal and that we need help. We need a solution for sin and death.

What do we do with this then? Do we get into pride and despair? Do we think there is sin all around and we are going to die, so we despair? No, God wants us to focus on the truth, and this is what the parable is all about—to understand that He is calling us to do something but also to find hope.

When Jesus tells the parable about the fig tree, it's important to understand the differences here of what a fig tree is. We don't really see fig trees. A fig tree would be something well known to the people. We see maple trees or ash trees all around. The fig trees would be lining the streets. They also represented peace and prosperity. So here is a fig tree that is supposed to represent peace and prosperity, everything going well, and here it is, dying. We see that the owner of this vineyard is wondering what is wrong, and that they should cut it down. But we see there is an answer. Why is this warning there, to cut it down? It's an understanding that there is this call to change, to

understand that the **bad** news that **we are stubborn sinners**. God looks at us and says "Where is the fruit?" If your hearts are hardened and if you are prideful and looking down on others because life is pretty good and because you maybe are like those Israelites in the desert who thought *we have God on our side. I'm close to Him. I can do what I want*, and we see the suffering that came about for them, then we have to see that we fall short. So God is calling to us. There is this warning to repent.

But in this, when God speaks in warnings, there is kind of a threat. ***"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.'"*** There is a threat. There is a warning. Why would God give a threat and a warning? Does God want to carry that out?

Think about as parents, when you are disciplining kids, or you're a teacher, do you want to always be threatening your kids with punishment, and do you want to carry that out? Is it our joy as parents, to think, *yay! Today I got to punish my kids again*. We don't want to carry that punishment out. You're trying to protect them. You are trying to keep them safe and to get them to change. In the same way, God threatens and gives warnings because He doesn't want to carry them out. He wants for us to see the reality—that we need help, that we need to repent. Why can we repent? As this tree, for three years has not shown any fruit, we see that God is still patient. Leave it alone one more year. The **good** thing is that **God is patient and forgiving**. As we talked about in the opening, God has an open door for us to come and to be forgiven.

What is interesting is what we feel about repentance. Do you want to confess your sins? Do you want to tell others the wrong you've done? More often we hide them and hold onto them and we pretend that God doesn't know what we've done. But God is loving and patient and forgiving, always waiting and wanting us to come, just like that prodigal son returning to his father. We'll hear more about that understanding of God's love and forgiveness for us.

We see in this parable that there isn't exactly an ending. It is very open-ended. We have to understand that God is calling each of us to Him, to not be afraid to go to Him but to go to Christ, because in Him, our sins have been washed clean. There is no sin too great. There is no sin that Jesus did not pay for. And what does Jesus say? ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** (Matthew 11:28) He gives us peace and hope and forgiveness.

So as we look at the tragedies in life and we look at God's patience and forgiveness, we see that we don't always know why tragedy happens. This is kind of the lesson of Job. Job had done nothing wrong, but there was still suffering. There was tragedy in his life. But there is never exactly an explanation. In the questions asked to Jesus, Jesus doesn't say exactly why they happen but to open our eyes to our sins, to repent, and to come to Jesus for forgiveness, and to be close to Him.

We look at tragedy and one of the questions you might ask is what the biggest, greatest tragedy is. There are many tragedies that happen in life, but I would say the greatest tragedy is dying without Jesus, to not have faith and to meet your end. That's what this whole section is all about. When you are called from this life, do you know your Savior? Are you at peace with Him? Do you know that you're forgiven and that heaven is in store? Or are you far from Him? If we understand that even when tragedy strikes and we know of God's love and peace and forgiveness, we can have hope. Because when a tragedy strikes, if someone dies in the Lord, we know that there is hope for them. We know that they are forgiven. They are at peace with their Lord. They are without sin now. They see the face of Jesus. And there is great happiness. We don't mourn like the rest of the world.

But I would say the greatest tragedy is not only dying without Jesus, but it would also be living without Jesus. All of this, the peace and the forgiveness that God gives us, is not just for death. It's for your life as well. To give you hope and peace now, to know that you are forgiven, so that whatever you face, Jesus is with you, always present, always patient. Probably depending on your age, you maybe know this truth about tragedy. Will you face tragedy in life? Will you face loss and suffering and difficulty? You will. We live in this sinful, broken world, so you will face tragedy. So the question is, are you close to Jesus? Do you know of His love and His peace and His forgiveness, that He is with you, that He has a purpose for that thing going on, that I'm not going to tell you what that might be, that you might never know exactly that purpose, but God promises He does have a purpose. That purpose is that our Lord wants us close to Him.

In the face of tragedy, whatever it might be, our Lord wants us to know that we are loved and forgiven and that your God is always with you. The truth is you might live another couple decades, if you're young, or tragedy might come. But if you are close to your Lord and Savior, if you know you are forgiven, then you can always be at peace; never fearful, never worried about all the things going on in the world but trusting in knowing your Lord is with you.

The truth is tragedy will happen. Tragedy is meant to help us examine ourselves and our place and our faith, but most of all, to cling to our Savior and to not run from Him and hide our sins but to go to Him, knowing He is forgiving and that when we repent, we have that forgiveness and hope. That's my prayer for you today—to not be afraid of tragedy but to cling to Christ in all this, knowing He is patient and forgiving and always with you. Amen.

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