

Order of Worship for March 20, 2022

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,
C: and also with you.

Opening Hymn: “*Christ, the Life of All the Living*” - Hymn #420

Confession of Sins

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
C: Amen.

P: We hear our Old Testament lesson from **Ezekiel 33:7–20:**

R: “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. “And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?’ Say to them, 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?

P: Lord, God, You do not want to punish the wicked. You want the wicked to turn from their ways. But so often we live in our old ways.

C: We lie, we ignore others, we lose our temper, we live for our own comforts, we overeat, we do too little exercise, we hurt others, we make excuses to not help.

P: Worst of all we try to turn it back to You:

R: “Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by them. Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways.”

P: If You judge us according to our ways, then we should all be wiped away from the face of the earth.

C: Have mercy on us!

R: "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: We cannot turn back. We are lost in our sin. But the God who does judge as we do, who does not desire our death has sent His Son, Christ Jesus to die in our place. In His name and by His command I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Response: (from Hymn 614 vs. 1-5,8)

All: "As surely as I live," God said, "I would not see the sinner dead. I want him turned from error's ways, Repentant, living, endless days". And so our Lord gave this command: "Go forth and preach in every land: Bestow on all My pardoning grace Who will repent and mend their ways. "All those who sin you thus remit I truly pardon and acquit, And those who sins you will retain Condemned and guilty shall remain. "What you will bind, that bound shall be; What you lose, that shall be free; To My dead Church the keys are given To open, close the gates of heaven." The Words which absolution give are His who died that we might live; The minister whom Christ has sent Is but His humble instrument. Praise God the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, Three in One, as it was, is now, and so shall be, world without end, eternally!

Service of the Word

Gospel Lesson: Luke 13:1–9

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the thirteenth chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: There were some present at that very time who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the

ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it 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.’”

P: This the Gospel of the Lord

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: “*Chief of Sinners*” – **Hymn #611**

Sermon: “*Worse Sinners*” - **Luke 13:1-9**

The news is full of disasters and tragedies. The Russian invasion of Ukraine entered a darker phase as Russian forces attacked a maternity hospital and a theater that was serving as a bomb shelter that had “children” written in Russian outside of it. Closer to home, the shooting outside of East High School in Des Moines continues to make news, residents continue to clean up after the tornado that went through Winterset, and each day seemingly brings another deadly auto accident.

When confronted with tragedy, with disaster, with suffering, our first instinct is often to figure out why. If we can figure out why disaster happens, it seemingly gives us some control over the situation, over our lives. If we can figure out why, maybe we can prevent it the next time.

Whenever disaster strikes, it’s easy to find voices that tell us why. After the 2014 earthquake in Haiti, Pat Robertson famously blamed it on a supposed pact with the devil the Haitians made as they declared their independence. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, some blamed the debauchery of New Orleans for the disaster. In our current disasters, we can point to Putin’s pride and greed as the reason for the suffering in Ukraine. We can blame gun access and the lack of family support and good role models for teenagers for the shooting.

Of course those answers are often simplistic. The blame for Katrina’s destruction comes from building below sea level, failure to maintain levees, and environmental destruction that removed barrier islands and wetlands that used to act as a buffer to keep storms from reaching the city. Haiti has had problems for decades, not caused by a pact with the devil.

It all goes back to our presupposition, conscious or not, that good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people. When bad things happen to good people, we’re left with questions. We’re left with why. We start to compare, to wonder if they were not as good as we thought they were. We wonder if they’re worse sinners than we are, and that’s why suffering came.

Today’s Gospel lesson shows us how Jesus answers that question. Jesus is asked about a tragedy that had happened recently in Jerusalem. A group of Galileans had apparently been attacked in the temple by Roman soldiers. Jesus then brings up another tragedy; a construction accident killed 18 people. Between the two examples, Jesus covers the spectrum of tragedies. One group of people are Galileans, like Jesus and his disciples, a more rural province known for being a source of political unrest. The other group seems to be those from Jerusalem, used to living in

the big city. One tragedy is the result of government oppression, the other the result of a “natural” disaster, or at least a disaster without a specific cause or blame.

One of the natural reactions to tragedies is to find someone to blame, some reason that it happened. After all, we do the same things in our own lives. When something goes wrong in our lives—when we suffer from chronic pain, terminal illness, the loss of a child, unemployment, or ruined relationships, we look for a reason. Sometimes we’re willing to admit our own part in the situation, our own guilt. Other times, though, it can be easy for us to assume God is out to get us. “What did I do to deserve this?” “Is God punishing me?” As fallen, sinful human beings, we tend only to see suffering through the lens of cause and effect.

While, in fact, sometimes suffering is punishment for sin, as we see throughout the Bible when people turn away from God, we can’t assume that’s always the reason. Sometimes, it’s the sin of someone else, as we pay the price for their pride or greed. Sometimes, suffering happens just because of the brokenness sin caused in creation, as God’s perfect world doesn’t work the way it should.

The response of Jesus to these tragedies, though, isn’t to find blame or point fingers. He never explains the why. He points out that the victims hadn’t done anything unusual to deserve their fates. But Jesus doesn’t stop there. Instead, he uses the tragedies to point out a universal truth – that none of us know when we will die. So much of life is outside of our own control; we can’t predict when tragedy will strike us. Instead, we’re reminded that we should be ready for when tragedy comes near to us. We do that by repenting, by turning back to God.

Jesus doesn’t answer the question of the “why” of suffering. Instead, he gives a message in response to suffering. The message is that we should turn our attention to our own lives and stop speculating about others. Don’t judge their worthiness – look at your own life. Life is short. Stuff happens. Be ready. Do those things that you should be doing. Pay attention.

C.S. Lewis in his book *The Problem of Pain* writes “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Pain and suffering come into the world not to show who the worst sinner is. It doesn’t come because God is capricious. It comes to call us to repentance. When we do repent, though, God forgives us.

Jesus didn’t answer the why questions he was asked about suffering. Instead, he went and did something about it. He headed to Jerusalem, where he would be arrested and beaten by soldiers under the control of the same Pilate who had mingled the blood of other Galileans with their sacrifices. Jesus would suffer and die on the cross so we wouldn’t be forced to bear the suffering our sins deserve. The only man who never sinned took the place of all of us who are worse sinners than He was.

In Jesus, God has redeemed suffering. Jesus is God in the flesh, God on the cross, God suffering for you and me in our place. Now suffering serves as a call to repentance, a call to receive God’s love and mercy, and a call to draw closer into the life of God. As Paul writes, “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance

produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts..." (Romans 5:3-5).

We may never know why tragedies happen. We shouldn't, however, speculate. Philip Yancey, in his book *Where is God When It Hurts?*, writes that "Suffering offers a general message of warning to all humanity that something is wrong with this planet, and that we need radical outside intervention. But you cannot argue backward and link someone's specific pain to a direct act of God."

So the next time that you are suffering, don't assume God is out to get you. The next time you see disaster, devastation, and disease, don't judge those who are caught up in it, who are forced to endure it. They are not worse sinners than anyone else—and neither are you. Instead, we are all children of God, and Jesus calls his children to repentance because he loves us and doesn't want us to perish. During this season of Lent, may we all answer that call to repent of our sins and be forgiven in Jesus' name.

Prayer of the Church:

Service of the Sacrament

Call to Communion:

P: No matter how bad our sin, Christ Jesus calls us to come to Him forgiveness. To make this forgiveness very real and concrete to us He invites us to receive the bread and wine, that is His true body and blood, in Holy Communion. Let us come to His supper, trusting in His promise of the forgiveness of sins.

The Words of Our Lord:

Lord's Prayer:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

Hymns: "*Baptismal Waters Cover Me*" - Hymn #616,
"*Fruitful Trees, the Spirit's Sowing*" - Hymn #691

Dismissal:

Lesson: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

R: I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 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, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 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. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Lessons on Falling Into and Resisting Temptation:

P: When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, they stood on two mountains next to each other. Half the people shouted blessings on those who followed God; the other half shouted curses on those who went astray from God. In the same way we remind each other of those who ignored God and those who obeyed Him:

(Left side of church) In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:3-7)

P: Cain fell into temptation and killed his brother.

(Right side of church) Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” (Genesis 22:1-2)

P: Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

(Left side) Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom). Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.” “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. (Genesis 25:29-33)

P: Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup.

(Right side) The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

(Genesis 39:2-4, 6b-7)

P: Joseph resisted Potiphar's wife.

(Left side) So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued." Samson answered Delilah, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man." Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied." He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man." Delilah then said to Samson, "All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric. Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." with much nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it. (Judges 16)

P: Samson let Delilah cut his hair and lost his strength.

(Right side) But Naomi said to Ruth, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!"

(Ruth 1:11-12)

P: Ruth stayed with Naomi.

(Left side) The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand chariooteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven. When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with

fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. (1 Samuel 13:5-8)

P: Saul gave into the people and did the sacrifice without Samuel.

(Right side) After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when He said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. (1 Samuel 24:1-4)

P: David did not kill Saul who was God's chosen king.

(Left side) While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." (Mark 14: 66-70)

P: Peter denied Jesus three times.

(Right side) Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in His own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords. (1 Timothy 6:12-15)

P: Jesus gave His life for us!

Final Prayer:

P: Almighty and everlasting God, You desire not the death of a sinner but that all would repent and live. Hear our prayers for those outside the Church. Take away their iniquity, and turn them from their false gods to You, the living and true God. Gather them into your holy Church to the glory of Your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways." - Hymn #707

Postlude