**3rd Sunday in Lent – Year C – March 3, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Luke 13:1-9 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Jesus Gives Us Time**

**I. Time to repent**

**II. Time to grow**

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

*6 Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’*

*8 “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

King Solomon once wrote, **“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)** It’s those first two that always makes me think**, “…a time to be born, and a time to die.”** How much time do I have? This week the newspaper printed obituaries for a 6-month-old and a 93-year-old, and every age in between. I suppose it doesn’t pay to ponder the question, “How much,” but more so, “What am I doing with that time?”

God the Holy Spirit reveals to us in his Holy Scriptures that our Heavenly Father is the giver of our time on this earth. That time is precious because it is the only time we have to hear and believe the most important message that anyone on this earth could hear in their lifetime: the message of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. You are here this morning because the Holy Spirit has given you the gift of faith which trusts in that message. God wants us to use the time we have left on this earth to his glory. But that doesn’t always happen. We often spend our time for our glory. And so God urges us to repent – to turn from sin, to turn to him for forgiveness, and turn back to right living. This morning our lesson is from Luke chapter 13, and the Holy Spirit will teach us that “**Jesus Gives Us Time**”, first of all, “**Time to repent**”, and secondly, “**Time to grow**.”

Jesus is on his final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Luke tells us that crowds were following Jesus. He had been critical of the crowds and their inability to interpret the “signs of the times.” “The kingdom of heaven is near,” Jesus preached, “Repent so that you do not perish.” It seems that some of the crowd sensed this criticism and told Jesus about Galileans murdered by Pilate to suggest that they were very aware that God does indeed punish sinners.

Very likely a group of pilgrims from Galilee traveled to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple. While they were on their way soldiers of Pontius Pilate murdered some of them. Nothing more about this incident is known apart from this mention here in Luke. These people implied that these Galileans who suffered death were worse sinners than the others in the crowds who were not killed. It was well known that Galileans often rebelled against the Roman government.

Jesus then suggested another incident. Eighteen people were killed when the tower in Siloam collapsed and crushed them. This tower was located near the pool of Siloam in the southeast corner of Jerusalem. Jesus asked the crowd if they also thought if these eighteen were guiltier than the other people living in Jerusalem at the time. Jesus corrected their erroneous interpretation of these two events. He said, “**No, [they were not guiltier.] But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**”

Jesus rejected the popular opinion that unusual suffering and death came to those who were worse sinners than others. People suffer in unusual ways, die horrible deaths, and are inflicted with hardship from natural disasters, but not because they were worse sinners than all the rest. Hardships, suffering, and death come to all because of the presence of sin in the world. We cannot, for example, point to Hurricane Sandy or Katrina or 9-11 and say that these events are judgments from God on the United States. God says nothing about this in the Bible. Earthly suffering and death is not a specific punishment for some sin which an individual has committed. However, if an individual chooses to live the rock n’ roll lifestyle of sex, drugs and booze, they will most likely suffer from cirrhosis of the liver, sexually transmitted diseases and a brain that doesn’t function the way it is suppose to.

Jesus wanted to point out that it doesn’t matter how an individual dies. All people are worthy of death because all have sinned. (Romans 5) When you see a tower crush eighteen people, or an agnostic governor sending his troops to slay worshipers, repent of your own sins. You do not know at what time or how the Lord will call for your soul. Repent. Acknowledge that you have sinned against God, look to God for forgiveness, then turn from that sin, and look to God for strength so that you do not fall into that sin again.

Other people speculate that since nothing majorly bad happens in their life it is a sign that they have been living good lives, and that they do not need to repent. The Apostle John wrote, “**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”** (1John 2.8)

Have you ever fallen into that line of thought? “I do not need to repent, at least not as much as so-and-so does. I wish so-and-so would have been here this morning. They really needed to hear this sermon.” That, my friends, is a sin against your God. God does not want us to compare our lives against others. He says, “Compare your life with mine and see how YOU stack up.” And as for that individual who needed to hear the sermon, maybe they did need to hear it. But the sermon is meant for you to apply to yourself first, not someone else. If we are truly concerned about that individual who needed to hear the sermon, God demands that we be patient with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Patient with your spouse, patient with your children, with your parents, with church members, with the pastor, even when they annoy, and offend, and don’t see your point of view, “Be patient and forgive,” God says. (Ephesians 4:32)

Unlike us, God is patient. Jesus described him as a gardener, who planted a fig tree in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit on it, but didn’t find any, and he told the caretaker of his garden to cut it down. He had given the tree ample time to grow and bear fruit, three years. The caretaker said, “Let’s wait another year. I’ll put in some fresh topsoil, lay down some mulch, fertilize it, water it, and then we’ll see what happens.” God is patient. How long did he give the people of the world to repent before he sent the flood in Noah’s day? 120 years! But because he is patient that does not mean we should wait to repent. Again, we do not know when God will call for us. Paul urges us, “**Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”** (2Corinthians 6.2)

God does everything he can for you and me, so that we see the seriousness of our sins, how serious something like the sin of impatience can be. If we do not repent, if we do not acknowledge that we have sinned, and ask God for forgiveness and turn from that sin, we run the danger of becoming that tree that has no fruit on it, and God threatens to cut it down and toss it into the fire.

Last Sunday *The Oscars* ceremony aired on television, and one of the films nominated for an award was *Zero Dark Thirty*, story of the pursuit and killing of terrorist Osama bin Laden. Let’s play “What if.” What if Seal Team Xix did not assassinate him? What if instead they captured him? What if he stood trial before a judge? What if the court proved him guilty of great crimes against our nation and other nations? hat if after all the evidence had been piled against him, the judge said, “Mr. bin Laden, you are free to go. Someone has offered to take your place. They will receive your punishment.” Incredible (and absurd)! Who would do such a thing for such a wicked man?

This is the story of you and me. As Jesus said about those who were crushed by the tower, they were not guilty of a greater sin. In God’s eyes what Osama bin Laden did is no worse than what you and I do on a daily basis. This is hard for us to fathom, but it’s true. God says, “The soul who sins is the one who will die.” (Ezekiel 18:20). He never explains which sins, he says, “He who sins.” We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with what society calls the worst offenders, and God sees no difference. But the judge says to you and me, “You are free to go. Someone else has offered to take your place, and they will receive your punishment.” The judge can make that declaration because Jesus stepped out of eternity into time, and lived without comparing himself to anyone on this earth. He always compared his conduct and words and even his thoughts to that of his Father in heaven. He presented himself as innocent before the Father. That is why the judge has declared you innocent. He has acquitted of the crimes of vanity, of self-promotion, of unforgiving attitudes. You are innocent because of Christ’s life for you.

What is more, though he was innocent, Jesus allowed his Father to accuse him of all your sins of impatience and unforgiving hearts. The Father punished Jesus instead of you and me, so that he might show his incredible patience and love with you and me. What’s even more amazing is that God the Father did this for Osama bin Laden, too. The difference is that he did not believe and through it all away. But by God’s grace, he has given you the gift of faith, which believes God’s declaration, “That is meant for me! I am acquitted!”

Through faith, when you confess your sins, God is faithful and just and does indeed forgive your sins through Jesus Christ. (1John 1:9) Yes, there is a time for everything. Jesus gives us time, time to repent. He takes the time to reassure you that are forgiven. And now he gives you time to grow.

It’s been just over a year since we’ve moved into our new building and I have to say, that a building project is never really ever completed. There’s always work to be done. For example, we still need to tend to the trees that are on our property, pruning, watering, mulching… This is a picture of what God does with us. Gives us time to grow, and gives us the tools to grow. Psalm 1, “**Blessed is the man…who delights in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields it fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers**.” You are trees planted by streams of water. Waters remind you of your baptism, in which you daily drown your sinful desires in repentance. Waters remind you of Jesus, the water of life, whose words are life giving water. When you study his word, read it, pray and meditate on his Word, you will grow. You will grow in your understanding and knowledge of the Bible. You will grow in your wisdom of how to apply his Word.

As you recall his words you will be like a tree that bears fruit, like a healthy, mature tree, a tree that will bear the fruit of patience. We know well the passage from 1Corinthians 13:4, “Love is patient, love is kind.” That is the love we will show to each other, the love of patience, love that doesn’t ask for anything in return. The other fruit we will bear is patience in suffering. Paul says in Romans 12.12, “Be joyful in hope, and patient in affliction.” Earlier we talked about suffering, hardships, and death. As we grow in God’s grace, we will be patient in affliction, because patience produces perseverance and perseverance produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us. We have the sure hope and confidence that Jesus will deliver us from all suffering and death when he takes us home to heaven. (Romans 5:3-5) Like a tall oak tree that stands the winds, winter storms, but is not without scars, it continues to grow. We all have room to grow, even pastors do, too. But Jesus gives us time, time to grow.

You have an opportunity to do that today, when you stay for Bible study and catechism class and Sunday school. You have an opportunity to do that tonight. If you have the History Channel on your satellite dish or cable programming, or have a friend who does, think about tuning in tonight to a miniseries entitled, “The Bible,” a cinematic depiction of some of the stories from the Bible. If you watch, I encourage you to watch with one eye on the screen and the other in your Bible. Use the rest of the week to read those stories you saw on television. Read and study these stories and God will cause you to grow. Yes, there is a time for everything. Jesus grants us time: Time to repent, and time to grow. Amen.