

Lent Three

03.24.19

Luke 13.1-9

"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

[1 Corinthians 10.13]

In the Name of Christ + Jesus our Lord

It's striking how middle of Lenten season has to contend with most college basketball games ever seen in four days or emerging Mueller report or annual covering of pine pollen

However, Lent's mid-point can more than stand up to these realities from world, it can take us right into center of new Life we graciously have in Holy Trinity

As today's (tonight's) Gospel opens up, our Lord is reacting to couple of disasters:

- There is group of rebels who have been gruesomely killed
- There is tower that has fallen, crushing / killing people

In both circumstances Jesus notes that his listeners will similarly die if they do not wrestle seriously with repentance

There are disasters surrounding us today

Those passengers on Boeing airliner in Africa, did they die because they were excessive sinners?

Or citizens in Venezuela, are they suffering / dying because they are such bad persons?

Our Lord would answer No in both situations, but he warns us that deaths / difficulties will occur if we do not take repentance seriously

Let's dig more deeply into this repentance (remember, biblically, it involves turning back to Lord God!)

Last Sunday we mentioned seven deadly sins that are part of Church's tradition – pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony (that is, over consumption), anger, laziness (remember, biblically, sin involves us turning to ourselves!)

When we hear our Lord's call for repentance, we are inclined to make it mental activity, that is, just thinking about it

"Oops, I'm sorry / I promise not to do it again!"

To cut through this activity / get closer to what repentance honestly involves, we take look at this lamp

We know purpose of this lamp is to provide light; we know that it has plug / bulb / switch

Would it be enough to just think about those three things to get this lamp to provide light for which it's designed?

Of course not!

You have to make sure lamp is plugged into power source, that its bulb is working / that its switch is turned on

Just thinking about is not enough to get light burning!

So it is with repentance, running it through our brains / apologizing for our behaviors is not enough to turn our lives back to Lord God

What makes such turn possible is that, from his compassion / mercy, Lord God intends to work our lives over / to nourish them!

This comes out in second part of today's (tonight's) Gospel where our Lord describes tree that is not producing

Initial assessment is to cut it down

Gardener, however, calls for patience, he wants to turn soil over / fertilize it, giving tree opportunity to produce

When we recognize how soaked-in-sin our lives are, such re-working of soil is easier said than done

Think again of those seven sins pulsing through our lives

Does phrase – “Oops, I'm sorry / I promise not to do them again!” – take care of their impact on our lives? No, sadly, it doesn't!

Is our Lord playing with us here? No, he is urging us to take his call to repentance seriously, very seriously

His call involves work, painful work, but it is work that steers us into center of Life that we have in him, Father / Spirit

Biblically, repentance means, first, confronting sins that swarm through our lives, it means, second, confessing those same sins / third, it means that those sins are met by Lord's Forgiveness

In these ways Lord God works soil of our lives over / turns them back into his Life

This frees us from attempting to handle these sins on our own, attempts that always leave us stumbling around in dark

As Lord God turns our lives back into his, he makes it possible, through his Forgiveness, for us to radiate light of his Life to others

Such radiating is vital for those who are trapped in lives of their own making

Think of all those individuals who no longer remember their Baptisms; who no longer hear, read or study Scriptures; who no longer receive Forgiveness or pass it on to others; who no longer eat / drink Lord's Body / Blood

These realities are as horrifying as airliner crashes or citizens having their lives destroyed

That's why our Lord is barging into our lives this morning (evening) / urging us to take his call to repentance seriously

To do that we need to take our sins seriously / to see how they keep emerging from us by always putting our lives first in all that we are / do

There is arresting verse near end of Psalm 50 where Lord God, after citing numerous sinful actions of people, makes this comment – “These things you have done, / I kept still, / you thought that I am like you!”

Let us not misinterpret Lord's silence in our lives, thinking we are evading any responsibility for messing around with our sins, thinking we can control them if they get excessive

My friends, we cannot evade that responsibility nor can we exercise such control!

May Son's Spirit push us to see clearly / fully what is going on in today's (tonight's) Gospel – our Lord is working our lives over so he can turn them back into holy places from where his Forgiveness streams into our lives / lives of world's people

As Lord works us over he causes us to realize how wrapped up we are in ourselves

He causes us to notice all personal pronouns when we are speaking – I, me, my; he causes us to see how that wrapping displays itself in our actions

He presses in closely with his four holy places so we will confront this wrapping up of self

He stirs us to confess that wrapping up to him / to one another

Then he draws us into his Forgiveness /, as he does, he moves us from thinking about repentance to actually doing it!

It is this Forgiveness that refreshes our lives, that takes us back to actual center of Life we have in Holy Trinity

Remember that just as this lamp won't work by thinking about light it could produce, neither will repentance

May Lord God keep hurtling his four holy places into our lives /, through us, into life of world so that all of us will get moved from thinking about repentance to actually doing it

As terrifying events of world occur around us, may they remind us of dying that waits for those who do not repent

And, as Lord's holy places keep crowding into our lives, may they remind us of living that waits for those who do repent!

Now may the peace of the Lord God, which is beyond all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ + Jesus our Lord