

Sunday, March 24, 2019

Psalm 42 766 VU

I Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

### Waiting to Grow

A young inexperienced bus driver speeds along a highway notices a problem with a tarp on his load and is distracted for a few seconds. He is in the middle of nowhere Saskatchewan and sees the flashing lights that an intersection is coming by but he continues to drive at the same speed. At the same time a bus carrying aspiring hockey players, coaches and friends is heading towards the same intersection. We know what resulted just over a year ago. The truck driver is sentenced to eight years in jail and possibly deportation to India.

Two young pilots are flying a huge airplane when something on the plane goes wrong- too late to turn back or even stabilize the plane and it crashes to the ground. On board are people from around the world on their way to international summits, work places for humanitarian aid. Ethiopia's farm land becomes a burial ground for all on board.

Cyclone Idai brings torrential rain to parts of a normally dry country and wipes out villages and towns with its mere force. The airport where people are waiting to get out of the country to safety kills those hoping to leave. The flood waters reach further inland and many people from the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe and Malawi lose everything. International aid is now responding with food and clean water. Life in these countries has stopped.

Groups of faithful Moslems are sharing in prayer in New Zealand and a gunman kills them as they pray. Bodies are now being released to family members and large funerals, prayer vigils and even changes to gun control laws are implemented.

Those are just a few of the more spectacular of a whole series of tragic and painful events which occurred this week in our world and yes they trouble our hearts and create questions in our minds. Questions of why? How?

Our reading from Luke 13 tells of some people who approached Jesus and asked his opinion about two incidents which raised similar questions. One apparently took place at the temple in Jerusalem, when Pilate ordered some Galileans killed while they were in the act of making animal sacrifices to God; the blood of those devout worshipers became mingled with the blood of the animals.

The other incident had happened not long before that. The tower of Siloam, which was part of the fortification of Jerusalem, had collapsed, killing 18 persons.

The people approached Jesus and asked, "Why do those kinds of things happen?" Did they happen because the people involved were so wicked that the tragedies were God's judgment upon them? We might also ask, why do bad things happen to good people?

Rabbi Harold Kushner's 1981 book, "Why bad things happen to good people?" attempts to answer this question as he writes as a rabbi, parent, reader and a human being. Kushner's three year old son was diagnosed with a degenerative disease which resulted in the fact that the boy would only live until his early teens. Kushner asked: Why, God? Years later, Rabbi Kushner wrote this straightforward, book "Why Bad things happen to Good People?" to mixed reviews because of his faith beliefs and because there is and always will be unknown factors which cause and effect the situations.

Kushner contends that bad things happen to good people because (1) it sometimes just goes that way; (2) we are given freedom of choice and consequently life is full of injustices; (3) nature is morally blind; and (4) there may be "corners of the universe where God's creative light has not yet penetrated." These ideas might leave us wanting more but what we should be doing when faced with evil and suffering, is asking "What do I do now?" rather than "Why did this happen—to me? Or "What did I do to deserve this?" Or did these situations occur because the people involved were so wicked that the tragedies were God's judgment upon them? Is God one of love or judgment? What does our faith tell us? What do our teachings show us?

Jesus gives no helpful explanation, but simply sidesteps the huge question of why there is pain and tragedy in the world, and he focuses instead on the purpose of human life. To him the question is not, "Why do people die the way they do?" but, "Why are we given life?"

Jesus then shares the parable of the fig tree. The vineyard owner had a fig tree and wanted to see fruit on it. But there was not any fruit. The landowner told the man who cared for the vineyard that for 3 years he waited for fruit on this tree and nothing happened. He wants the groundskeeper to cut it down because it was taking up valuable soil space in his vineyard. But the keeper asked for it to be left for one more year- and with extra care—digging around it and fertilizing it there might be fruit next year. The vineyard keeper said after the year if it bears fruit great if not he would cut it down.

Now we don't know the fate of that fig tree but it is in the waiting time that we must focus. For 3 years the landowner wanted to see results—had he not said anything to the vineyard keeper in the time before? Why not? Was he just looking to expand the grapevines and ready to do this just then? What was the purpose of waiting 3 years?

Maybe he was not aware of the nature of the fig tree. If a fig tree is not old enough to produce seeds, it will also not produce fruit. A fig tree will not have fruit until it reaches at least

two years old, but it can take some trees as long as six years to reach the right maturity and bear fruit. And most importantly, there is nothing you can do to speed up the rate of a tree to maturity. It is part of God's creative handwork and there is nothing that forces seeds to mature. But what if we look at this parable differently beyond the story itself?

Imagine you are the impatient vineyard owner, the kingdom of God is the fig tree and God is all the gardener who is pleading with us not to give up. Is this realistic in light of world events today? Especially when we question- why God—why did this have to happen?

God who created all things has called upon us to look after the world, and its people yet sometimes we question why, what if and how did God allow this to happen. Instead of asking Why are we given life? or what is our purpose as faithful followers of Jesus. Are we feeling defeated or even question our roles as individuals and even whether we have faith strong enough to keep on going. But God pleads with us not to give up!

As we continue our walk through Lent we know that the cross of Jesus lies before us. but in the meantime, we are being guided by his teachings and we wait for what is to come as we grow in faith and as we grow older.

Soon many people will plant seeds and bulbs and water everything, wait for the summer heat and hope that there is a high yield from what is planted. But nothing can occur until God enables the sprout to form. We cannot make a seed germinate, nor a tree bear fruit. But what we can do is enable the process and to wait upon God and not give up/

God needs us to be his feet and hands, his voice and ears as we listen and tell Jesus' story of healing, preaching the good news of eternal life and how we need to repent so that we might be redeemed.

The world is not perfect and so it is our purpose as God's children to see that ability to forgive and the ability to love are what God has given us to live out our lives more fully with bravery and courage as well as having meaning. Yes but how? You might ask this as you seek to be forgiven—"Asking God—for forgiveness for doing those things we ought not to have done and leaving undone those things which we ought to have done." And who will rescue us? (Romans 7:4; 8:1) it is Jesus Christ for through him we are set free. Through his death and resurrection we are called to believe and once we are forgiven and redeemed we live according to the Spirit.

And yes we will be tempted just like the people of Israel whom God saved after generations lived and died in the desert. But God is also faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. You will not be given more than you can handle and if /when you

might feel that you have too much on your plate, or you are feeling snowed under, or searching for a way out of the large to-do list, God will make a way for you. You just need to be patient and wait. Waiting is a part of growing up and growing into your faith. Waiting means enabling the seeds of faith God has planted in you to sprout and grow as you are able.

When we consider our walk with God we must remember that it is one day at a time, one hour at a time and as the clock ticks out seconds. God will not fail you as long as you keep strong and continue to grow in faith. God will never abandon you and his hand will guide you and sustain you always.

Let us remember these things while waiting to grow and while we strive to understand God in this world of wonders. Let us pray:

Holy God we are individuals who seek your presence in our lives and we are a gathered church family who are waiting to grow stronger in our faith as we are Christ's disciples who believe and know that Jesus enables us to live with hope and joy always.

Be with us in those moments when we wonder about why things occur in this world and where you are. Help us to realize that we too have a role to play—praying for peace and hope made possible through Jesus our Saviour. Hear these our prayers we offer to you as we repent and are redeemed through your love. SILENCE Amen