

February 28, 2016  
Luke 13:19

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

“Why?” This wasn’t just an average, ordinary “why” but rather this “why” was laden with anger, sorrow, and fear. This “why” came out of the young mother’s mouth as an absolute plea for an answer to the horror, chaos, and grief, which had rocked her world in the last 48 hours. She had searched for every possible reason there could be as to why her young daughter lay in a bed, hooked to a plethora of tubes and machines. The body she once held close in her loving embrace so full of life, joy, and laughter now lay motionless, helpless, and so fragile. Her mind had raced through the scenarios and the “what if” statements but she simply couldn’t come up with a logical explanation as to why. Finally, in a desperate attempt to make sense of the situation and gain some control she finally she posed this conclusion to the chaplain, “I just don’t get why this happened. She was so young and innocent. She didn’t do anything to deserve this. It must have been me. It must be something I did wrong that God would do this to my sweet girl.”

This question and the theology embedded in the young mother’s response happened not all that long ago. Yet, it is virtually the same question posed to Jesus roughly two millennia ago. The old adage seems to hold true doesn’t it, “The more things change; the more things stay the same.” Ponder just how much the world has changed since those gathered with Jesus grappled with trying to make of two horrific acts that rocked their community, lives and left them searching for meaning. While we are never told they asked a question, clearly Jesus’ response indicates the conversation we are not privy to resulted in their concluding these two

events came as a result of God's divine punishment for some sin committed by those who perished at the hands of two completely unrelated events. One came as the result of the harsh and brutal behavior of Pontius Pilate. While some gospels paint Pilate in a more positive light and seemingly innocent of the violent death Jesus suffers on the cross, the scene laid out here paints a more accurate picture of just how heinous, ruthless and torturous this ruler was as he enforced Roman law with every fiber of his being. The second came as a result of what could be deemed more of a natural disaster as a tower fell and killed 18 people. We are told nothing else about this event like was it an old tower that had been crumbling for some years or had it been engineered and constructed wrong? Luke is not interested in that but rather his point in lifting up these two events: one clearly planned and carried out by human hands and the other resulting due to an unforeseen and random act is to capture the scope of all life throws at us and the same response Jesus gives for these events applies and covers the gamut of any and all events which leave us grasping for answers. We long for a clear-cut, definite as to why things happened but He doesn't exactly give us. He doesn't provide any clues as to why the tower fell or tell us if those Galileans in the midst of worship did anything to provoke Pilate's wrath. He still leaves those present and all others to come wondering if there was more. There are many ill-fated events in life we simply don't have answers to the "why" questions we ask in their wake. Yet, Jesus does give us one answer and that is a resounding "No" these events happened as a result of their sin. After all, this had been the leading theology of their day and sadly continues to play out in people's minds yet today leading them to the conclusion of our young mother who ultimately viewed God as distant, angry, vengeful, and a God of death and not one

of life. Another theology of ancient times was the sins of a parent would also pass to a child thus when something happened to a child it clearly was the result of the parents sin.

Jesus says “no” and then twice seems to give an ultimatum that sounds quite brash and certainly not very compassionate, empathetic, and helpful to the angst and bewilderment these people were experiencing as he states, “unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Quite honestly, that doesn’t seem to bring a whole lot of comfort to my (our) ears. Yet, perhaps, that is because we, like them, need to reorient ourselves to what Jesus is saying. And that is exactly what repentance can mean - reorientation of our entire selves. In this season of Lent with its theme on repentance we often think of it having to do with moral uprightness or an expression of regret or a “180-degree turnaround.” While that does hold true, “here and at other places in the Bible repentance refers to a changed mind, to a new way of seeing things, to be persuaded to adopt a different perspective.”<sup>i</sup> And just perhaps that is exactly what Jesus was getting out. Is this not what Jesus has been doing throughout the gospels as he proclaimed, “Behold, the kingdom of God has come near.” Has he not been intent on reframing, transforming, and opening up people to a new understanding of God and God’s kingdom? Is he not the clearest revelation of God as he draws as close to God’s people as one can get: eating with them, healing them, reaching out to them even though they were sinners, and walking with them through all of life’s ups and downs? Is not Jesus the one who will most fully reveal the love of God in dying and rising? When Jesus calls those gathered (and subsequently the church) to repentance perhaps He is calling them to let go of those beliefs that separate us from God; such as that one that deemed every bad thing which happened was a result of one of the many laws they failed to uphold. In do so Jesus is telling them to stop

judging others enduring some affliction as worse sinners, let go of trying to be right in God's eyes solely as a result of their own work and their own control, and let go of an image of God out to get them, inflict some sort of punishment on them, and accuse them of every misdeed. Perhaps, when Jesus says they too will perish He is implying not so much in a physical state but rather in a spiritual state in that holding on to these things has rendered them dead to fully experiencing the goodness, grace, love, and presence of God. It has left them held hostage to the notion of a distant and wrathful God. It has cut them off from entering into the relationship God so much desires to have with God's creatures. Perhaps, this is the reorientation or repentance Jesus calls them and us to in our gospel text today. Repentance steeped in God's delight, God's joy, and God's will to be in relationship with them and with us. Repentance is God's call and gift to reorient our lives to God, to put our whole trust in God even when crap happens, because notice at no time does Jesus say misfortune, pain, and sorrow will not come our way. Repentance leads us to acknowledge the very fact we can't control our own destiny, we can't go it alone, we can't live fully detached from the very One who breathed the gift of life into us, and when we do some part of us has already died as we become disconnected from God. God has not disconnected Godself from us but rather we have loosened the bond that holds us to God through a distorted vision and understanding of who God is and what God is up to and has done in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Repentance, while not always easy, ultimately is a gift from God that helps us grow spiritually and draw closer to God who rescues us from all that separates us from God through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Matt Skinner, Commentary on Luke 13:1-9 from [www.workingpreacher.com](http://www.workingpreacher.com)