

## Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

The Jews of Jesus' time believed that they could save themselves by obeying God's laws. The Pharisees trumpeted the Law as the means of salvation for all Jews. They added hundreds of laws to God's Law to cover all possible situations. They believed that in obeying all of these laws they could be sinless.

Related to this legalism was the belief that if a person suffered a great loss, death, injury, or disease, it was because that person had sinned, angering God who then sent suffering to the sinner.

There were two major problems with this system. First, it was illogical. Jesus taught that all are sinners. No one but Jesus was sinless. The other problem was that the system assumed that sins were of different degrees. Jesus taught that even sinful thoughts separate us from God. Salvation through obedience, classifying sin, and believing that all personal suffering was directly sent by God led to the prideful practice of accusing those suffering of being out of God's favor and not worthy of the attention of the "perfect."

It is true that murder causes more visible suffering than lying, but in God's eye both lead to eternal death.

Jesus said on this occasion that some men killed by a falling tower were no more sinful than anyone else. His words contradicted the legalistic system of salvation. All sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem, causes eternal separation from God; and a suffering person has no more guilt than anyone else in God's eyes.

Jesus' challenge to His questioners concerned whether they could redeem themselves. His warning was the parable of the vineyard keeper, who begged for mercy for the unfruitful fig tree. If the tree could not bear fruit, it would be cut down. If the sinner cannot redeem himself, he will be lost forever.

Jesus' message was simple. If you are not right with God, you will be lost eternally. If you cannot make yourself right with God, you need a Savior. To recognize your Savior, you must understand your sinfulness. Luther said that it is the Holy Spirit who calls us to Jesus; to recognize who He is; to see our need. The faith to believe is a gift He grants to us each day.

*Now is the best time to join a Bible study.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

1. What conclusions had some come to about the tragedies that had occurred? Is this response typical?
2. What lesson does Jesus teach from those tragedies? Why is repentance an appropriate response to personal and large-scale tragedies?
3. How do we see the patience of God in the story of the fig tree?

### For Family Reflection

4. Can you think of a recent tragedy? What lesson might God be trying to teach you through that tragedy?
5. How has God shown His patience to you? What is your response to His patient grace?
6. Can you think of someone who doesn't seem to be bearing the fruits of faith? How might God use you to "dig the soil" or "fertilize the soil" so that it might be more fruitful for Him?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Today's reading includes the story of the prodigal son. This devotion is based largely on a new book, "The Prodigal God" by Timothy Keller, that is being studied in many Lutheran churches across the country this year.

The Pharisees were angry that Jesus was associating with "sinners." As you may remember from last week, their attitude related closely to their assumption that man can save himself by obedience. Jesus replied to their disgust with three parables about God's love for the lost.

In the parable of the prodigal son, have you ever considered that both brothers sinned against their father? Let's concentrate on the older brother, since he is a picture of the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking.

The older son was angry because he perceived that he had perfectly obeyed his father. He doesn't mention loving his father, just that he had done all that his father asked. He had been faithful, and now this worthless little brother had returned and good ol' Dad was throwing a very expensive party for him. "What about my party?" was his complaint.

The Pharisees were the older brother. They did not love the Father. They were using Him. It was the Jews' attitude throughout the Old Testament and continued in Jesus' time.

The Pharisees were angry that the worthless "little brothers" were being accepted and loved by Jesus. They had done all the work and now this popular rabbi was concentrating on the worthless instead of the "worthy." To paraphrase their thoughts, the Pharisees were asking, "If you are the Son of God, where is the reward that You owe us for being faithful and good?"

Are we sometimes the Pharisaic older brother? Do we expect the "good life" because we are good Christians? Are we offended that we have been slammed by the recession? Do we forget that we have no right to demand of God; that we "deserve" nothing special? We have not earned our salvation--it is a free gift. A gift for which we are grateful in any circumstance.

***Invite a friend to Bible study!***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

1. What objection of the Pharisees (vs. 2) caused Jesus to teach these parables? What parables (vs. 4-7; vs. 8-10) precede the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
2. Summarize the journey of the younger son. What made him come back to the father? With what message did he return? How are we like the younger son?
3. How did the father receive his son? How is our Heavenly Father like the father in the story?
4. How did the older son respond to the grace of the father? Was he justified in his reaction? How are we like the older son?

### For Family Reflection

5. Are we glad that Jesus receives sinners? Who is the church for?
6. What are times of celebration in your family? In your church? What do you think the celebration of saved sinners will be like in heaven?

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Luke 20:9-20

Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is His last week of teaching before His execution. The religious leaders fear and hate Him. Jesus has cleared the temple of the crooked marketplace. The people hang on every word as He teaches in the temple every day.

One day, the religious leaders (Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees) lined up to again challenge the Son of God. Jesus confronted them with a parable.

The story of the vineyard planter was a clear story of the religious leaders, Israel, the Son, and the Father. God created His nation. The nation's leaders rejected Him. He sent the prophets to them with His message of judgment and restoration but they were killed. Then He sent His Son, and they wanted to kill Him to protect their own power and false beliefs. Jesus adds that they will lose it all and implies that their blessing will be removed and passed on to others (the Gentiles).

Jesus was often blunt in His teaching and in His treatment of arrogant religious leaders. Sometimes we vent our anger and we justify our attacks and warnings on unbelievers and the unrepentant by referring to Jesus' actions, words, and even sarcasm. When we do, we are forgetting two very important things.

First, Jesus showed mercy to unbelievers. He talked with the woman at the well, explaining salvation to her. He talked with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who met Jesus at night because of the danger that visiting Jesus brought on him. Jesus healed the Roman centurion's servant and the synagogue leader's daughter. Jesus loved sinners in need of salvation and showed them mercy--honest mercy, not ignoring their sin, but forgiving it. It was the religious leaders who experienced Jesus' anger--His loving anger. Those who knew better, who were convinced they were godly, needed strict correction.

Second, we rarely are capable of loving anger. Our anger is 99% self motivated. We have been wronged; we are superior; we deserve respect. Jesus loved even those on whom He was the hardest.

Did the Pharisees understand Jesus? The gospel authors agree. As Luke records that they were enraged, not repentant—"they understood that He spoke this parable against them." May we always respond in repentance to His loving corrections.

***Is your Bible wearing out from use, or is it in storage?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Luke 20:9-20

1. See if you can interpret Jesus' parable. Who is the owner of the vineyard? What is the vineyard? Who are the tenants? Who are the servants?
2. Who is the beloved son? How does the tenants' treatment of the son predict what would happen to Jesus?
3. Read Psalm 118:22 (also written as vs. 17). How is this verse prophetic of Jesus' passion? How is this verse prophetic of Jesus' resurrection?
4. What was the reaction of Jesus' critics to this story? How is their reaction similar to the reaction of some today to Jesus' words?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. Do we always welcome Jesus into our heart and home? What are some times that we reject Him and His word? How is God patient with us?
6. We are nearing the end of the Lenten season. How has this season been a blessing to your family and to your church family? What have you learned about Jesus' love for you? How have you shared His love with others?

## Palm Sunday

Luke 22:1-23:56

Today's reading cannot be condensed into one page, so what part should we choose? The apostles who slept as Jesus prayed; Malchus, Jesus' enemy whose severed ear was restored by Jesus; Peter, denying his Master three times; Pilate, who desperately wanted to release Jesus; a crazed mob that chose the murderer Barabbas over Jesus; Herod Antipas, who mocked Jesus and placed on Him a royal robe; Simon of Cyrene, a stranger forced to carry Jesus' cross; the thief who received salvation while dying; the centurion who made a shocking statement after Jesus' death; Judas Iscariot, Jesus' betrayer; a sixty-foot high, four-inch thick curtain guarding the holy of holies ripped from top to bottom; Joseph of Arimathea, member of the Sanhedrin, who placed Jesus in his own tomb; or Christ, who endured torment, torture, separation from the Father and death so we can experience eternal life?

Considering the people mentioned, all with their own stories, what distinguished a disciple from an enemy of Jesus? Was it the ability to understand? No one understood! The disciples thought Jesus was about to crush His enemies and establish a political kingdom. The religious leaders believed Jesus threatened their pride and power, and that He might even rebel against Rome. The people wanted Him to be King of Israel. Neither friends nor foes understood what was about to happen.

If understanding did not define *disciple* or *enemy*, what did? Though slow to understand, Jesus' disciples believed that He was Messiah and Savior. The enemies of Jesus thought Him dangerous. They persisted in disbelief and set themselves against Jesus. What defined enemy or disciple was *Faith* in Jesus as the Christ.

Today, enemy or disciple of Jesus is still defined by faith. The faith that leads some to reject Jesus, to think of Him as a good guy in trouble with Rome, to deny His existence, to persuade others to believe as they--that faith based in lies identifies Jesus' enemies.

Do we make our faith, and place it in self, wealth, government, relationships? Or, is our faith a gift within us given by God? Is our faith a gift by which the Holy Spirit leads us to and firmly roots us in Christ?

Faith in the Person of Christ as our Savior and Lord makes us disciples, brothers and sisters in His kingdom. It makes us His children.

### *Are you in a weekly Bible Study?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Palm Sunday

Luke 22:1-23:56

1. This Sunday is traditionally called "Palm Sunday." Read Luke 19:28-40. How did the week begin? How did the procession of praise become a painful walk to the cross?
2. Reflect on some of the key personalities of the passion. What was the role of Judas?
3. Where do we find Peter during the passion of Jesus? What are Peter's weaknesses? What are Peter's strengths?
4. What is the role of Pilate? What is significant about the Apostles' Creed statement "crucified under Pontius Pilate"?
5. Who was Simon of Cyrene? What seemingly insignificant role did he play in the crucifixion? What do you suppose that experience was like? What did Simon see? What did Simon hear?
6. What do we learn about the criminals crucified on the crosses besides Jesus? How do they respond to their situation? How do they respond to Jesus? What was the response of the centurion at Jesus' cross?
7. Who was Joseph of Arimathea? What was his role in the passion?