

*At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”<sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.<sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?”<sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.<sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’<sup>8</sup> He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.<sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’” Luke 13:1-9 NRSV*

One of the things I have heard from a few people when something bad happens to them is this comment; “What did I do to deserve this?” They are implying that the bad thing that has befallen them is because of something bad they did on another occasion. There is a sort of logic to that statement especially if what has happened to them comes out of nowhere, and they feel they’ve lived good lives.

That thought by a few people today, was actually the way of thinking for all people in the time of Jesus. Several times in the gospels the question arises as to someone who needs a physical healing, whether their sin or family sin was the culprit for their predicament.

In the scripture lesson above Jesus really challenges that way of thinking with the two tragic incidents where folk tragically perished. Twice he says that unless all in the group gathered around him repent and turn toward God they all will perish! This had to be a horrible shock to those there. If it ended there spiritual progress could seem unattainable.

But the parable of the fig tree not only tempers that conclusion, but its ending leaves the result open ended, so that we do not know what the final result was. I believe Jesus taught the parable that way to show us that while certainly God’s grace is more than ample to forgive and renew, there comes a point when a holy God exercises judgment. We affirm the day of Jesus judgment each week when we say the creed.

Each of us is responsible to God for our lives, and it is ultimately true our standing before God is by faith alone. However how do we respond to such grace in our lives? Is the grace we’re shown reflected in our relationship to God and neighbor?

Repentance literally means “turning around and going in the other direction”. Such a process may not be easy because we may go against long ingrained patterns of behavior. However, probably some of the most spiritually fruitful times in my life came when repentance was taken seriously.

Do you desire a deeper spiritual life, do you desire God’s direction, or has God given you another chance when perhaps you’ve done something wrong?

You may even know that God has given you another chance. Make the most of the opportunity. Someone once gave this sober reminder: *“There is only one instance of a death bed conversion in the Bible, the thief on the cross. **Only one** so that we would not despair. But **only one** so that we would not presume.”*

God help us, when moved by the Holy Spirit to turn back towards God, bearing fruit in service to God and neighbor.

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