

**Now is A Good Time**  
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Luke 13:1-9

13:1 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4 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? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

6 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. 7 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?’ 8 He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

When is it the right time to take action, or make a change? How do we know if this is the right time, or if we should wait? Trying to figure out what is happening and why, and what might happen next – these are questions that nag us constantly – especially when bad things things are happening.

In Luke 12 and 13, reading and interpreting the signs is a recurring theme. The crowds continue to press in on Jesus and the disciples and are looking for revelations and explanations for what is happening. It’s a lot like the way retired generals and political analysts are getting shuttled from the set of one news program to another to explain what is happening in Ukraine... and what is likely to happen next. The way we want to know if this might be the beginning of World War III, the people pressing in on Jesus want to know, “Is this the Messiah about to appear? Are you him?”

The answers Jesus gives are not very satisfying, but they are memorable. Instead of giving *Make Israel Great Again* speeches, Jesus gives parables. Instead of rallying people to his political cause, Jesus calls them to live for the Kingdom of God. He says, “Do now worry about your life... Your Father knows what you need. Seek the kingdom.” (see Lk 12:22-34.) Then he will challenge them: You can look in the sky and tell whether or not it will rain. Why can’t you see that now is the time to get right with each other before judgement comes? (see Luke 12:54-59.)

In this morning’s passage, some people tee-up another “signs of the times” conversation by asking Jesus if he’s read the headline about Pilate killing some Galileans while they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. It’s presented to him in a way that is intended to be shocking, like a commercial for an upcoming episode of 20/20. It’s intended to get Jesus (and us) emotionally hooked.

Shocking events like this lead us to ask the big, hard questions. How do we find meaning in such a senseless tragedy?

Jesus' response must have been at least as confusing to them as it is to us. It's not clear if the people think Galileans received divine judgement. Does Jesus think so?

Tragedy is so mysterious to us, and we are constantly trying to make sense out of it. Judgement is not so mysterious to us – we think it makes perfect sense to us. But there really is not making sense of tragedies. And God's judgement is more mysterious than we might first imagine.

In essence, what Jesus says is:

- Bad things just happen.
- Tomorrow isn't promised to any of us.
- So change your mind and change your direction now!

Bad things happen: They just do. Trying to figure out why will make us crazy.

Tomorrow isn't promised to any of us: Whenever tragedy befalls another, it can be a wake-up call to the rest of us not to take our own lives for granted, or the time we have available to us. Living each day like it could be our last isn't bad advice.

So Repent! Jesus says: Instead of looking out the window at other people's tragedies and shaking our heads, we should look at the mirror and make a change, now!

"Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." Could Jesus mean: Unless you change your mind about God, your death will seem just as tragic, pointless, and without meaning?

**Illustration:** "Steve" falling off the pier and dying instead of being reconciled to his wife and family.

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This brings us to this puzzling yet hopeful little parable Jesus tells. The landowner might be impatient – unfairly so, since he is talking about cutting down a young fruit tree. According to rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 19:23, fruit from newly planted trees was forbidden for three years (Keener, IVP Background Commentary). He shouldn't even be expecting fruit yet! The gardener calls upon the landowner to practice patience. Let me give this tree extra attention. If I do everything I can and it still won't bear fruit, then the tree can face the consequences.

Jesus is the gardener. He's done everything he can to reorient us toward the kingdom. There is patience. But there is also a time limit. We don't have infinite opportunities to change direction, to give and receive forgiveness, to make things right. We all have an expiration date. And none of us really know what that date is.

**Steve's brother's eulogy:** "Now is a good time."

Call

Is there any unfinished business you've been putting off with someone close to you? Contact them this week. Work it out.

When it comes to other people: Be patient!

When it comes to ourselves: Now is a good time!

Amen.