

## Taking Up Space

3-3-2013

Luke 13: 1-9

*1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." 6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "*

Repent, the end is near! Repent the end is near! When most of us hear that phrase, don't we conjure up an image sort of like the pictures I just showed up on the wall? Almost immediately we picture of some sort of nut. I almost titled today's sermon "repent the end is near", but I didn't want you to think I was any more of a nut than you already do.

As we listened to today's scripture lesson, Jesus tells those who had come to Him, both in verse three and again in verse five, **I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.** Jesus didn't say the end is near, but He did tell the people to repent. Let's look at our scripture a little more in depth. In verses one and two we read **Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.** <sup>2</sup> **Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?** It takes a bit of a history lesson to really understand today's lesson. From time to time, some Jewish or some Galilean rebels would hold a rally or mount a small rebellion against the Romans. Pontius Pilot was known to be a very vicious ruler and had no trouble sending the Roman soldiers to make bloody examples of those who rebelled against the Roman rule. One of these events had taken place in the temple. The Galileans were in the temple and the Romans came in and killed them, spilling their blood everywhere. Their blood mixed with the blood of the sacrifices they were making. How horrible; human blood being mixed with the blood of an animal sacrifice. Why, it's almost heresy. The people came to Jesus and told him about this atrocity. They were hoping Jesus would make some type of political statement against the Romans and what had happened. And they were hoping He would also make some type statement about the people who were killed, being more wicked than the people who weren't. Old Testament thinking about sin and retribution for sin was, the worse the sin, the worse the retribution. So the Jews are thinking that the Galileans who were killed by the Romans must have been some pretty wicked people. Their sins must have been worse than those who did not get slaughtered by the Romans. But Jesus didn't say anything like that. Listen again to verses two and three: <sup>2</sup> **Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.** No, it didn't have anything to do with the type of sin or the amount of sinning. Then in verses four and five Jesus continues in this same tone: **Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.** Around the same time that the Galileans had been killed in the temple, a tower had fallen in Jerusalem killing eighteen people. Jesus lets the people know that the people who died were no worse or any better than anyone else in Jerusalem just because they happened to die in an accident.

If you search the scriptures, you will not find any other mention of these two events. Yet, historians feel that these things did happen. The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, reported several similar events that would lead us to believe that these occurrences, these retributions by Pilot, were not all that uncommon. Jesus shocked his listeners by not taking a political stand against Pilot, but rather by the stand He took against them; repent.

Unless you repent, you too are going to die. During Jesus' day, there was a prevalent belief in the Jewish Community that there is a correlation between physical suffering and sin. In Romans 6:23 the Apostle Paul even says, **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** In John 9: 2 - 3 we read, <sup>2</sup> **His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"** <sup>3</sup> **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,"** said Jesus, **"but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.** Jesus is rejecting the notion that suffering and death are caused by sin. He is trying to make the point that tragedies occur, whether they are caused by man, or caused by natural disasters. When the Roman soldiers killed the Gentiles in the temple, it was a tragedy. When the tower fell on the eighteen people in Jerusalem and killed them, it was a tragedy. The tragedies didn't happen because someone sinned, they just happened. Sometimes bad things just happen. And when they happen, if they happen to you, you had best be ready. Repent now, we don't know when the end will come. I'm not trying to sound like some end of times person, however, we better be ready. There are two schools of thought concerning the end of time. The first school: the end of time is when the world comes to an end. I guess that one is pretty self-explanatory. The second school: the end of time is when you die. Let me explain what I mean by that. When I die, the world as I know it will come to an end. At least it will come to an end for me. Whether you subscribe to the first school, or the second, none of us know when the end of time is coming. In Matthew 24: 36 we read, **"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** We just do not know. Jesus tells the people of his day and the same goes for us, **But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**

Jesus then tells a parable in verses 6-9: **"A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"** **"Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'**

It's interesting that this is part of today's scripture. A couple of years ago, Maggie and I planted two fig trees. We put them on either end of our forsythia bushes. We thought we probably needed two because of pollination and stuff. So far, nothing, no figs. We've actually talked about pulling those two trees up. We haven't made any decisions yet. And now I read and study about today's scripture. Maggie, I guess we are going to have to think about these two trees a bit longer. Maybe we need to work them a little more, and give them another year, give them another chance. Then again, as I look a little deeper into this section of the scripture, I'm not really sure figs is what this parable was all about. What if Jesus was talking about us. You haven't done what you're supposed to do; I'm going to give you a little more time. Jesus has spent a few minutes talking to the people about repenting. He has tried to impress on them the need to do so. And now He is letting the people know that God, the land owner, is going to give them a little more time. He is going to allow the gardener, Jesus, to work on them just a little longer. God is going to allow Jesus to help us develop our fruits.

I ran across this quote as I was working on today's message and it had an impact on me; listen: "I note that the 'sin' of the fig tree is not that it is doing something bad, but that it is doing nothing! It is just taking up space in the orchard." As I read that, I couldn't help but think of myself; it's not that I'm doing something bad, but am I doing anything and am I doing enough. Then I began to think of us as a congregation and of the people within in this congregation. We come to church on Sunday mornings, sit quietly, pay attention, sing a few songs, drop a few dollars in the collection plate as it passes, listen to the sermon, take communion, and then leave and go about our business. We're not bad people, no, we're really not. Actually, I think we're pretty good people. But what are we doing when we leave here. Now, that's not intended as an accusatory question. I don't think any of us, and I'm including myself in this as well, I don't think any of us are intentionally bad people. I don't think we set out to do bad things. But, are we doing anything? Are we trying to do good things. Do we intentionally try to do good things to and for others? We may be really good people, but is our sin like that of the fig tree? Are we simply taking up space in the garden? The sin of the fig tree was not that it was doing something wrong. The sin was that it was doing nothing. Is that our sin? The purpose of a fig tree is to produce fruit. That being said, what fruits are we producing? What are we doing as Christians for our fellow man? The good point of

this parable is that it gives us an element of hope. Don't cut the tree down; let it live another year. There is still time for the fig tree to bear fruit. The gardener has asked for one more year to make something of the tree. There is hope for us. Christ is asking for a chance to help us change our lives. There is still time for your life to bear fruit. There is time for each of us to dig, and fertilize, and water our hearts, there is still time for us to nurture our hearts and ask for God's forgiveness.

We are in the third week of Lent. This is a time for self-reflection, a time of study, a time to move away from those things that separate us from a relationship with Jesus Christ. Lent is a time of repentance. Is our sin the sin of doing nothing? Are we simply taking up space? If so, then now is the time to repent. Now is the time to produce fruit in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.