

Third Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: Luke 13:1-9
Date preached: February 28, 2016
Sermon Title: Getting what you don't deserve

The relationship of suffering to how God addresses it is one that many people, believers and yes, non-believers struggle to understand at various points in their lives. The non-believers answer the question by dismissing the truth that there is a God. They use the existence of suffering as a means for rejecting God.

There are some who look for the cause and effect of suffering to a particular sin or sins. For some it is as simple as you reap what you sow. In Job 4:8 it is expressed in this way. "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."

Indeed, we can bring about our own suffering by various behaviors. The smoker has a higher probability of developing lung disease, esophageal or lung cancer, emphysema, etc. Those who worked in the coal mines were much more susceptible to a condition called black lung.

Yet there are times in our own lives or as we've seen it in the lives of others where the cause and effect are not aligned. By that I mean that there seems to be no justifiable cause for the amount of suffering we may experience.

In Jesus day, and perhaps in our own, the question arises about the connection between sin and suffering. There are people who come to Jesus with a question about an incident that took place where Pilate had a number of Galileans killed.

Jesus is quick to point out that their deaths at the hands of Pilate did not come because they were worse sinners than other people. What Jesus does do is that as occasions arise he rejects the notion that people who suffer are worse sinners than those who don't. "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you;"

In John 9 there is a conversation between Jesus and his disciples about a man they see who was blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

They were making the connection that the blind man's plight was a result of his or his parent's sin. "Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'"

Now Jesus is not saying that God caused his blindness. Jesus is keenly aware of what we learn from Lamentations 3:33. "...for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men."

What Jesus does do is to demonstrate the power of God over things as blindness by restoring this man's sight.

The bottom line is that we are all sinners, regardless of whether one finds themselves afflicted with disaster after disaster or life is just peachy with barely a problem. Our sinful nature puts us all on level ground. Each person's sinful nature may be evidenced in different ways, but the result is still going to be the same.

The liar, the abuser, the manipulator, the cheater, the boastful, the arrogant, the gossips, the slanderers, the faithless, the heartless, and anyone else's sins I may have omitted, are all deserving of death. Romans 6:23 reads, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Again from Romans 3:23, "Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," we deserve what we get. We deserve death. But what God gives us is a free gift. What God gives us is eternal life.

What God gives us is the very things we don't deserve. God gives you mercy, forgiveness of your sins and mine, a clean slate to live faithfully to Him, and as stated in Psalm 85:7, "steadfast love and salvation.

These are gifts we have not earned. These are the things God chooses to give. The very nature of God is to generously bless you with forgiveness and love, which provides the peace that surpasses all human understanding.

God's mercy, forgiveness, and love were shown to the world on the cross, where his only begotten Son extended those gifts to undeserved sinners such as you and me. It was on the cross that Jesus made the beautiful exchange, our sinful self for his unblemished, pure righteousness. And yes, it is not only given for you, it is given for the person who even though he or she is your brother and sister in Christ, in our humanness we just can't stand.

God is patient. God is patient with people we think are far more sinful than us. God is patient with you and me. Jesus shows us the patience of God in the parable of the fig tree. For in that parable, we see God still at work even in the lives of those who struggle in bearing fruit.

God is at work through each individual member of the church to call people to faith. God is at work in you to sow the seed of His word in the lives of unbelievers. God is at work in you to nurture, water, feed, and tend the faith that is alive in your brothers and sisters in Christ.

In a book called Lutheran Spirituality the author writes, “Mission involves the speaking of the Law to uncover and dethrone sin, the unbelief that delivers death, but ultimately the mission of the Church is to proclaim to sinners that God has reconciled them to Himself in Christ and that He forgives them their sin.” God has given you what you don’t deserve. God forgives you all your sin. AMEN.