



"Time for Grace"

Third Sunday in Lent

8:15 & 11:00 am, Sunday, February 28, 2016

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8;
1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the movie "Castaway" Tom Hanks plays a FedEx manager who travels all around the world as they expand their services to other countries. Now I don't want to tell you exactly what happens in the movie, but it's called "Castaway." Has everybody seen the movie? Okay. Well there's a point in the movie where Chuck Noland is in Russia starting up FedEx services there, and he is trying to inspire them and tell them the value of the work that they are doing and how important time management is. As they are gathered around, with his words being translated, he says, "Time rules over us without mercy. Not caring if we're healthy or ill. Hungry or drunk. Russian, American, beings from Mars. It's like a fire, it could either destroy us or it could keep us warm. That's why every FedEx office has a clock, because we live or we die by the clock. We never turn our back on it and we never ever allow ourselves the sin of losing track of time."

Now Hanks is talking about this in the context of delivering packages un-timely. But I think the wider message is making the most of the time that we have, and his character finds out that when he is on a deserted island after a plane crash. All he has is time, and how important it is to make the most of it just to survive.

Jesus also talks about time. He lifts up two tragedies to those who are gathered with him. The first was perpetuated by Pilate going into the temple and mingling the blood of Galileans with the sacrifices after a rebellion. The second is a tower falling on people. Now for you and for me, we can understand violence sometimes. We understand that sometimes bad people do bad things, and even as it might touch our lives and how difficult it might be, we understand the idea of sinfulness and violence. But sometimes senseless accidents like a tower just falling can be more difficult to get our minds around. And yet, both sets of victims didn't do anything to deserve what happened to them. They just happened.

Jesus is trying to say that it's not necessarily sin that makes things happen. They just happen. And the fragility of life can affect every single person. Sometimes bad news is just bad news, and it can happen to any one of us. And who hasn't been touched by illness, or the death of a loved one, a lost job, short sale on a house. No one is better or worse when it comes to tragedy, Jesus says.

So what will you do about that? How will you live your life with that understanding?

Given that fact, how might life be a little different for you and for me?

On one level, we could just live regretting everything that has happened to us, or maybe even worse yet we can expect that more of the worst is to come. In other words, we could be paralyzed by both fear as well as dread. Or, we can choose something different. We can choose to live life with greater urgency. We can choose to make the most of the time, whatever it brings to us. I think that's why Jesus calls his disciples to repentance. Repentance is immediate. He says to them, "Unless you do this now, don't wait, now is the time to turn your life around."

Repentance in the Old Testament is an act of the heart. It's more than just mere words; it is defined by clear action on the part of the believer. Actions that lead to more justice, more mercy, more faithfulness. "Seek the Lord." Isaiah says, "While he may be found. Return to the Lord that he may have mercy on them and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

For Jesus repentance is a turning. The word in Greek is *metanoia*; a fundamental change how you and I understand our life to repent is to completely reconfigure our perspectives. To change how we look at reality and life and all of its meaning, a reorienting ourselves toward God. Repentance is a process of turning again and again to God and living in his mercy and grace. More than just a one-time turning, it's a whole life of orientating ourselves for God and his goodness. The illustration that Jesus uses is of a fig tree in a vineyard. It was common for them to plant fig trees in vineyards to offer a little shade and a different kind of fruit. This particular fig tree might be offering leaves and shade, but it's not offering any fruit. So it's not fulfilling its purpose. The gardener says, "Just give it one more year. One more year to do what it is supposed to do."

Now, when I was playing cards with my grandfather and you would get down to where you had lost all of your pennies, there was that time of grace, one more chance to keep playing. And so the gardener offers that one more opportunity to live and to fulfill its purpose. To paraphrase Max Lucado: God always answers the messiness of life, the trials and temptations, the heartache and failures with one word: Grace. We are all living in a time for grace.

In the beginning of lent we heard these words inviting us to participate in this season with our whole hearts. "God does not desire the death of sinners but instead that they may turn to him and live." That's grace.

So let us make the most of this time of grace. As Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." Let us bear fruit and live life to its grace-filled fullness. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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