

# *The Engine Light Is On*

Luke 13:1-9

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ November 18, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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.’”

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Repent.

Repent.

When I say that word, what comes to mind? Pay attention to a feeling or a memory or a sense of what you think might be to come. *Repent.*

Maybe there is guilt, shame, regret, or even fear that accompanies that word for you.

Let me start at the end. Here’s what is going to happen today as we leave our time

of worship. We are going to have an opportunity to walk out the doors with hope that brings new energy into our lives and erases all regrets. Do you know why? We have a chance this morning to understand *repentance* the way Jesus intended, which is very different than we may have thought, very different than we may have been taught.

Hear what Paul says to the Corinthian church, and this is my prayer for us this morning:

<sup>9</sup> Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. <sup>10</sup> For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor 7:9-10)

For far too long the word *repentance* has been used to stir up fear and anxiety about what is coming in the future or deep regret about our past. Jesus changes the way we think about repentance. with two real life current events in this passage, and a parable in response. Perhaps today we can move from grief toward salvation and new life. But in the middle between grief and salvation, we find the key, which is repentance.

But don't miss the ingredient that comes first: Grief. Not the kind of grief that shuts us down emotionally and makes us run away from each other and from God. The world around us wants us to experience this "worldly grief" that leads to hopelessness.

This morning, I want to give you permission to grieve. We could probably all use a good cry after these last two weeks. There is much to be deeply sad about. The smoke in the air hangs around as a constant reminder of so much loss for so many people. But is there a chance that we could enter in together with a "godly grief", one that refuses to shut down, but continues to hope, and leads to a no-regret kind of repentance, because we know we are turning toward One who is a source of rebuilding...resurrection...and beauty out of the ashes. Easy for us to say, right? But this isn't vain optimism. This is something we are called to declare as a community in good times and bad.

I think this group of people need to be shown on the big screen this morning. The girls on these volleyball teams are a sermon all on their own. Last weekend was the Division VI volleyball semi-finals. The girls from Forest Lake Christian High School in Auburn were scheduled to play the girls from Paradise Adventist Academy. The girls from Paradise were coming to play, despite having no equipment and no uniforms. All of these things were completely lost in the fires. What they didn't know was that their opponents wanted to turn their grief into an opportunity for generosity, sportsmanship, new life and hope. In only 24 hours, The Forest Lake girls' volleyball team raised \$16,000. So when the Paradise girls arrived for the game, they were given new

uniforms, new knee pads, and new socks, and a huge meal to celebrate after the game in which they gave them bags and boxes of clothing and useful items and \$300 for each student in gift cards. This was accompanied by tears and laughter and prayer.

If that story alone does not move us to want to live life differently, then perhaps nothing will. Their incredible grief, became godly grief that led to new life and hope. And what was the piece that brought it together? *Repentance*. Especially if we define repentance as "turning around and seeing with the right perspective."

Turning around and seeing with the right perspective.

Luke records for us two events from recent history that are not recorded anywhere else in Scripture. One of them is an instance of horrific violence that seems to be endorsed by the leadership of the state—Pilate has apparently slaughtered innocent Galileans in the middle of their offering in worship. He brought this violence into a house of worship, into their church. It's unthinkable. And it hits a little too close to home. Then there is another event in which a tower along the wall in Jerusalem fell and took the lives of 18 others. Presumably, no one is to blame here in this accident disaster. Again, way too close to home. Two events, one natural and one unnatural, Gentiles in one and Jews in the other. And in both cases, there is a nagging question that lingers out there:

*Whose sin was responsible for this? Why are these people being punished by these events?*

And here is an opportunity by Jesus to correct a major flaw in their theology, and perhaps also in our own theology that lies

buried but still very present in our thinking. When bad things happen to us, how often do we try and figure out why? How often do we find ourselves saying, “Why me? What must I have done?”



The other day I was on the way to the auto mechanic because my engine light was on, to find out if the issue was minor or end the career of yet another vehicle in my life. On the way, I was hitting every single green light beautifully, and I caught myself thinking, “This is my day! Maybe that means I’ll get good news shop!” But, God does not affect the stop lights and the reality of my car situation at that moment. Instead, God promises to be a presence with me, a source of hope that will change my perspective of the situation if I turn toward Him, and put my trust in Him.

*Repentance* is to realize that a relationship with a God that is present with us is even better than a God who changes our situation! It’s a completely different way of viewing God.

I have to remind myself periodically when things are going unseasonably well in my life OR when things seem to be all going in the wrong direction that the circumstances of our lives are really not God’s domain. God cares, and God acts on our behalf certainly, but the rain is going to fall on the godly and the ungodly alike. Political leaders are going to make decisions that affect all kinds of people in various ways, sometimes tragically. Towers are going to fall. Forest fires will continue to destroy.

Luke has a way of including events that allow Jesus to respond that it doesn’t

matter if you’re Jew or Gentile, if the event was someone’s fault or not. “Do you think they were worse sinners than others?” Jesus asks. Don’t let the event distract you from what’s important:

And what is really important?

Is it who is to blame? No.

Is it who deserves punishment and who doesn’t? No.

Is it the severity of the event or how it came about? No.

What is important is that God has been doing everything possible to get our attention, to give us a chance to know him, to have a relationship with him....and we’ve missed it. All because we are trying to play guessing games about what God is up to.

Is there a warning in Jesus’ call to repent? Of course.

I like lights of all kinds: candles, flashlights, the sun. But can I share with you my least favorite light of all time, without a doubt? One that I’ve already mentioned it this morning?

[CHECK ENGINE LIGHT]

When I see it I get a wave of panic every time. And while I may not like it, I heed its warning every time.

When you are five miles out of town, heading up into a long windy mountain pass...in the winter...in the dark...with your family in the car...you really have only two choices. You can pretend that you

don't see it, merely *hoping* it will be all right for the next couple hundred miles...

...or you can turn around, head back to town, and get more information from someone who knows cars. Either way, you will be paying attention to every smell, listening to every sound, alert to every bump on the road. But if you turned around, your anxiety begins to ease as you start to see the city lights, familiar surroundings, warm places to get rest and find out what's going on.

A call to repentance is not about avoiding the calamity and suddenness of death. No. That happens to ALL of us, eventually (as Jesus is trying to point out in these first two stories). Repentance is about the grace to not miss out on the goodness of the fruit that God can grow in our lives.

The engine warning light is less about the pain of being stuck somewhere, and more about the agony of missing out on hundreds of miles of adventure that awaits us, starting right now!

Repentance is the refusal to LINK our trust in God to our good or bad circumstances. Repentance is to trust anyway, completely, regardless of the violence we face or see in the world, or adversity we find along the road.

Jesus says, "Repent. Turn around. I'm offering *you* a new perspective. I'm offering *your community, your church* a new perspective. Turn around. The road I can take you on will far exceed even what you originally planned, but first, repent, let me show you what's missing.

Thomas Merton wrote: "But the man who is not afraid to admit everything that he sees to be wrong with himself, and yet recognizes that he may be the object of God's love precisely *because* of his shortcomings, can begin to be sincere. His sincerity is based on confidence, not in his own illusions about himself, but in the endless, unfailing mercy of God."

The endless, unfailing mercy of God is actually at the heart of the parable of the fig tree, believe it or not. Jesus wants us to see it. I'm not sure his listeners heard it. But I want to make sure we hear it. The owner of the fig tree may seem harsh, taking drastic measures to want to cut down this poor tree. But, God is harsh. God will NOT tolerate *anything* that prevents his children from experiencing the fullness of God's life within them. God takes absolutely drastic measures when it comes to sin—even to the point of sacrificing his son on the cross to conquer it.

One reminder about reading parables. While they usually have something to say about ourselves, they usually have far more to teach us about the character of God. One commentator suggested that instead of the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, we should call it the Parable of Divine Patience. We are left with an owner who is merciful to the end, convinced that it is not too late for this tree to still bear fruit, even though it's been not one, not two, but three years, since any fruit has been seen.

I often hear people say, "Live every day as if it could be your last." That goes along with a more traditional sense of "Repent or Perish!" putting all of the emphasis on our own worth or unworthiness.

As God's people, we are reminded here that are call is to put our complete trust in a God who is merciful to the end, year after year, over and over. When we see with that perspective, we begin to be transformed. We begin to bear fruit!

Perhaps our motto should be: "Live every day as if you'll have another....because you know a God who won't give up on you."

When we think we'll never be able to really change, live every day as if God will give you another chance. We may begin to know what kind of God this is, and then we'll begin to change, too.

There is a perfect formula for repentance coming up in a couple of chapters in the parable of the Lost Son. Here is the formula for a son who has stolen his father's inheritance, squandered it, and in desperation wants to come back home, if only as a servant so that he can eat, knowing he deserves nothing more. Here is the formula:

1. PERSPECTIVE – he realizes how dire the situation is as he wishes he could eat what the pigs are eating
2. CAREFULLY CHOSEN WORDS – he forms a speech, he has regrets, he is deeply sorry for what he's done, he puts together a declaration of who he has become
3. HE MEETS A FATHER  
MERCIFUL BEYOND HIS  
WILDEST IMAGINATION, who runs to meet him unexpectedly and showers him with love.  
Irresponsible. Undignified.  
Undeserving. And yet, real, deep, authentic because this is his child who was lost and has been found.

Like the fig tree, the Father could have cut him out of his life and memory. But he held out hope even after months and months, giving him a new chance everyday.

Until...

He found perspective...

He found the words...

He found a wildly merciful father.

Sometimes we find ourselves overwhelmed with grief and helplessness about something in our life or some tragedy that surrounds us. What can we possibly do?

The Forest Lake volleyball team found something they could do. They met the needs of those that were right in front of them.

When you don't know what to do, do what you know, then you'll know what to do. We are having some conversations about adopting a family or two who have lost everything while they are going through this difficult time. You might consider adopting a family as well to pray for, support, offer meals, gift cards. I can give you information.

When you don't know what to do, do what you know.

Jesus gives us the recipe for the most important thing we can do if we want to bear fruit that will give hope to all of those around us: **Repent**. This gets to the very root of the tree. Say you're sorry for forgetting the amazing and irresponsible love of God. Turn back around so that you

too can experience all of the fruit of a life with Christ, more than you ever thought possible.

God is impatient with sin and being separate from us, so his judgment is harsh, but his patience with us as his children is wide and deep and long and high.

Live every day as if you will have another, because of God's immense love for you.

Amen.

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### **The Next Step**

**A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application**

1. Read Luke 13:1-9 again. What questions does this passage bring up for you?
2. There are two historical events in this passage and one parable. Jesus uses them to appeal to our need to repent. Which of these three are most convincing?
3. Jesus uses an example of violence endorsed by the government as well as a great accidental disaster. As Christians, what are the helpful and unhelpful ways we have responded to events in our own recent history?
4. Jesus may appear to sound like evangelists who whip up fear after every natural and unnatural disaster. But looking more closely, how does Jesus use a different approach?
5. How would you define repentance? Does this passage re-define it any differently?
6. In such ominous real-life examples, where do you see the good news in this passage?
7. Read together Luke 15:17-19. What can we learn about how to repent from this familiar moment in the story of the Lost Son?

**Table to Table Question**  
*A question for kids and adults to answer together*

Talk together about what it means to "repent".  
How is that the same or different from saying sorry to God?