

Is Any Place Safe?

[Text - Luke 13:1-9]

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Because of today's technology, you and I can receive - and share - tragic stories, with remarkable immediacy. As a result, it can sometimes feel as if terrible things are happening all the time. Unfortunately, in a world of 7.4 billion people, they actually are! So, while we do gather here to proclaim the *Good* News that Jesus brings, sometimes we do so against the backdrop of Life's *bad* news. And this is absolutely fitting, because any faith practice that doesn't take into account Life's terrible tragedies, is simply incomplete. And to proclaim a faith in Jesus Christ, without confronting the reality of his own suffering and death, is completely disjointed and diluted.

In this morning's New Testament reading, some people come up to Jesus and tell him that the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, has "mingled the blood of Galileans with the blood of their sacrifices." In other words, Pilate has these Galileans killed while they're in the center of the Jerusalem Temple, presenting their prayers and offerings to God. This senseless slaughter, in a sacred sanctuary, is certainly hard to fathom. It's also hard to figure-out exactly why these people are telling Jesus this news. Maybe they're trying to warn him, a Galilean, to stay away from Jerusalem - it's too dangerous there. Or, perhaps they're trying to get Jesus fired-up, so he'll rally the people, storm into Jerusalem, and overthrow those murderous Romans.

Jesus is already on his way to Jerusalem when he's told about this mass murder. Yet he doesn't respond by cautiously retreating; nor by compassionately railing against the Romans. Instead, he faithfully continues his journey toward Jerusalem, fully recognizing the real possibility that *his* blood and his life may also be sacrificed there. Nevertheless, Jesus moves forward, determined to teach and to show that Divine Compassion doesn't hold back; and that it is intended for *all* people - even those who would seek to do him harm! Regardless of how the religious authorities attack him; in spite of the threats of the

Roman rulers, Jesus moves forward with a Divine message of love and grace. It's a message of *Good News*, in spite of the Bad; a proclamation of Life, in the face of Death. It's a tremendously powerful sign: that Divine Compassion can overcome the power of hatred and violence, ignorance and fear.

I think it's intriguing, that in response to this news of those Galileans being killed, Jesus brings-up yet *another* tragedy that recently rocked Jerusalem - when the tower of Siloam collapsed, and crushed eighteen people to death. It's almost as if Jesus is trying to make us confront Life's toughest question: "What do we do when the senseless suffering of Life comes crashing-down upon us?" That's a question we all face, at one time or another. So this morning, I'd like us to use this reading to help us sift through the rubble [as it were] and try to make some sense of Life's senseless pain, suffering, and death.

The first thing we discover, is Jesus' clear and emphatic assurance, that when tragedy strikes, it is *not* some kind of "punishment" from God! "Do you think these Galileans suffered in this way because they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? I tell you NO....Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them - do you think they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you NO...but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Jesus says that suffering, pain and death are not signs of an angry or judgmental God; but they *can* be a sign and a stimulus for personal reflection on what is truly important in our lives. The truth is, we will *all die*! The mortality rate of the human race still holds steady at 100%! The question, therefore, isn't whether we will *die*; but rather, how shall we chose to *live*?

In those terrible times, when pain and loss, suffering and death come crashing into our lives, one positive thing that can also come, is a much clearer focus on what is truly important to us. It *is* a time to "repent" - which means that we readjust our thinking and our acting; that we let go of those things we no longer find valuable, so that we

can embrace those things and those people of genuine worth. God does not *afflict* us with bad things, Jesus declares; yet God can *inspire* us - breathe into us, the spirit and strength to overcome those bad things that are a natural part of Life.

The Tower of Siloam collapsed because of poor construction, not as some devious Divine plan to punish those who just happened to be there. Those Galileans were slaughtered in the temple because of a bad Roman Governor; not an act of God to punish bad Galileans. So Jesus, the good and wise Galilean rabbi, sets the record straight on this extremely critical point: God does not *cause* Life's traumatic and tragic events; *however*, God truly is present - with us and for us - in those tragic and traumatic times.

That Divine Presence is most frequently experienced through other people - those who are willing to stand beside us, to comfort and support us in our darkest times of pain and despair. But sometimes, it's in the isolation of our inner anguish that the still small voice of Divine Peace whispers to us that somehow, in time, things *will* get better; and that Life's story is far from finished. In the midst of Life's storms and tragedies, there can still be some surprisingly hopeful signs - like a rainbow, signifying that the worst is finally over; or a Cross, which reminds us of the depth of Divine Love; or an Empty Tomb, which announces that the best is still to come.

As Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, all signs indicate that he is heading directly into his own time of tragedy, suffering and death. Yet as the Gospel proclaims, even then - *especially* then - the Holy One is fully present to faithfully carry Jesus through the darkness, into the light of a glorious new day.

Here's the bottom line: There is no place on earth that is completely safe. No matter how many guns we carry, or weapons we stockpile, or walls we build, we cannot insulate ourselves from Life's dangerous problems and pain. So rather than listening to all the false promises of fear-mongering politicians, we need to trust in these 2 faithful promises of our Holy Source: First, that the loving and gracious path

which Jesus walks, is the only way to find genuine peace, joy, and wholeness. And second, that while the troubles and tragedies of this world *will* pass-away, the Divine Light and Love which is a part of us all, will endure throughout the ages. This is the Gospel! This is the Good News that renews our lives and gives us hope.