

Third Sunday of Lent

(Cycle C)

READING I: Exodus 3:1-8,13-15 **DATE:** 03/06-07/2010
READING II: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12 **PLACE:** Corpus Christi
GOSPEL: Luke 13:1-9* **TIME:** 4:00 p.m.; 10:30 a.m.
EVENT: mass

THEME: Our only response to evil must be to confront it, no matter where it comes from.

I. Tri-Church Lenten Series

- In these beginning weeks of Lent, our three neighborhood parishes – Brown Memorial Presbyterian, Memorial Episcopal, and ourselves – have been exploring the problem of evil.
- The central questions continue to be: just what is evil? and where does it come from? and how do our traditions respond to it?
- And, of course, we expect to resolve all of those questions by our final session this Tuesday!
- Sometimes evil is easy to identify.
- When terrorists rammed two jet liners into the World Trade Center, few of us had any trouble calling that evil.
- Whenever human beings knowingly plot to kill or harm others, that's evil.
- But what about earthquakes in Haiti and Chile? or Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?
- Some might say that natural disasters aren't evil, they're just natural.
- Others might say that, regardless of the underlying cause, whenever human life is lost, that's evil.
- Still others might argue that, while the natural phenomenon itself is not evil, when human greed or disregard in those situations results in more loss of life than necessary, then that's evil.

II. Victims as the Cause of Evil

- Most of us were horrified when we heard some people – especially Christian leaders – speculate that the loss of life on 9-11 was the result of America's sins of homosexuality or, in Haiti's case, the people's compact with the devil.

- It’s hard for us to imagine that the victims of these events are the cause of their own misfortune.
- Surely they were victims, not perpetrators.
- Yet that kind of thinking, as we hear in today’s gospel, is as old as the Bible itself.
- When Jesus responds to questions raised by Pilate’s mixing the blood of certain Galileans with the blood used in sacrifices or the accidental death of workers on a tower in Siloam, it’s clear that some believed that the victims were the cause of their own misfortune.
- They believed that if people lost their lives in a disastrous way, it must have been because of their own sinfulness.
- Jesus tries to put that kind of thinking to rest.
- “Were those people any greater sinners than anyone else?” he asks.
- My no means.
- Bad things happen to good people.
- Jesus’ own life and death is a testament to that.
- We cannot conclude that, just because bad things happen to people, those people are bad themselves.

III. Repentance

- What Jesus *does* point out to the crowd is that we all must die.
- And the issue isn’t so much about how or why we die: the issue is about how we live.
- Therefore, he warns us all, we only have time to repent while we are still living; so if there are changes in our lives that need to be made, now is the time.
- The Greek word that the gospels use for *repent* is *metanoia* – which, literally means, change of mind, or change of thinking.
- Jesus is teaching us that, in a world full of evil, our job is to change the way we think about our lives, our world, and the evil that surrounds us.
- It’s not helpful to blame victims for their own misfortune; it is only helpful for us to examine our own way of thinking about evil.

- When we witness the horror of terrorist acts, we shouldn't respond with vengeance and hatred: rather, we should change our thinking about how we confront evil with goodness and justice.
- When we see the awful destruction caused by hurricanes and earthquakes, we shouldn't be shrugging our shoulders, as if there is nothing we can do: rather, we should change our thinking about how we can confront evil with generosity and care.
- When we even recognize the sinfulness that resides in our own hearts, we shouldn't respond by despairing of our brokenness and weakness: rather, we should change our thinking about how we can confront evil with virtue and determination.
- We need to change our thinking, not only to avoid evil, but to confront it when we see it.

IV. God's Patience

- And so Jesus concludes this lesson about evil with a parable about the fig tree.
- It's a parable about God's patience in humanity's failure to produce goodness.
- A failure that not only strikes us collectively, but each one of us individually.
- So often, when evil arises in our lives, we respond by believing that there is not much we can do.
- The problem is too big; the problem is too complex; the problem will take too long to solve.
- Perhaps, says Jesus, but God is patient.
- Jesus' parable about the fig tree is not so much a threat about what may happen to us if we fail to change our thinking about evil; it's a message of hope to encourage us to try over and over again to confront the evil in our lives and in our world.

V. Conclusion

- So, what is evil? and where does it come from?
- Well, you'll have to come Tuesday night to get that answer.
- But, for now, let the eyes of our hearts be enlightened.
- Our only response to evil must be to confront it, no matter where it comes from.