

20-26 March 2022

Luke 9: 13:1-9

One more year

Read the passage from Luke. It is written below.

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

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. 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?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Bible notes

This passage could be an example of thoughts and ways diverging: Jesus sees the story of these horrific events in quite different terms from some other people. Those discussing what had happened seem to have taken the view that the meaning of the events must rest in their cause, and that this cause was past sin. Jesus challenges their assumption that the people to whom this happened must have been exceptionally sinful. The event itself may be the same as that referred to in Acts 5.37. It is possible that the followers of 'Judas the Galilean' were killed when they came to offer the Passover sacrifice, so that their blood mingled with the blood of the Passover lambs.

However, Jesus introduces a second story of suffering – that of 18 people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. The tower of Siloam was near to the pool of Siloam, so these men could have similarly been completing a religious act when they died. So this story neatly balances the former, making the point that this sudden suffering, or indeed any suffering, can happen to anyone and has nothing to do with how sinful they might be.

Those discussing this seem to be distancing themselves from it – it is about 'them'; but Jesus takes the opposite approach and makes it personal: 'Unless

you repent, you will all perish just as they did' (v.5). If you want to learn from these events, do not look to their past, look to your own future. The question of repentance is properly addressed to all of us. The precariousness of life should bring us up short, but not to 'tut' ghoulishly, nor to speculate on the sins of others, rather to look carefully at the qualities of our own lives. The parable that Jesus goes on to tell offers hope in terms of another chance, one more year to produce fruit.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

It is fruitful (pun intended!) to spend some time reflecting on the parable of the fig tree with no fruit. Who is the man who owns the vineyard? Is this God? Who is the gardener? Is this Jesus? Is it us? The gardener is on the tree's side. He or she wants the tree to have every chance to bear fruit. What might be the equivalent for us, in our lives, of the process of digging around and adding manure? Living in the time between these careful, and perhaps repeated, acts of tending and next year's decisive harvest – what does this mean for us?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



Questions

- How does a tree look different from this angle?
- How might you look at your life from a different perspective?
- Or that of the community in which you live?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of praise

We praise you, living God, that through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus,

we have the chance to begin again, as we learn from his words;

we have the opportunity to flourish, as we follow in his footsteps;

we have the calling to serve, as we grow in his likeness;

we have the time to do what is ours to do, as we trust his promises – slowly but surely, day by day.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord God, you look for growth and fruit;

help us this week to grow closer to you,

and to be patient when we have to wait – as you are patient with us.

Amen.