

When you turn on the news at night and you see another tragedy, what is the first thing that you think or feel? For some folks, their hearts just break open. They want to know how to help. They start to pray. For other folks, they are filled with questions - why did this happen? Maybe sometimes you even experience a mixture in between.

For the folks in Jesus's day, they didn't have news shows to watch in the evening, but news of tragedies certainly traveled far and wide. Jesus is going through the countryside, working his way to Jerusalem, but he keeps facing holy interruptions. Moments to teach. People to heal. And now in this particular moment, about a tragedy that had taken place.

Pilate, yes that same Pilate who we will encounter on Good Friday, and the same Pilate that we heard about in Luke, chapter 3, marking the time of Jesus's birth, that Pilate has killed some unnamed Galileans. We don't know all of the details, but what we do know is bloody - Pilate killed these unnamed Galileans because he wanted to show his power and might, and so he simply did it.

Jesus knew what was in the people's hearts and it was a question - what did the Galileans do that caused this to happen? In other words, people were searching for a reason for this tragedy that would allow them to put some space in between themselves and what had happened. Maybe these folks deserved it. Maybe they had sinned in some unspeakable way and God was punishing them. Maybe....maybe.... Maybe...

Sometimes it is hard to have compassion. And other times we are afraid to have compassion. Henri Nouwen in some of his most beautiful writings shares that to have compassion is to suffer with. But that can make us afraid. For if we suffer with someone, we weep with them. We see ourselves in them. And we realize that this could just as easily be us who is in this place of darkness.

Jesus saw folks questions that were blocking out their compassion. But don't we sometimes have similar questions or thoughts today? Jesus has just spoken prior to this about the judgment of God, so of course folks are wondering if this tragedy was God's judgment. We, too, ask if something is an act of God. Or if it was a person's sin that caused them to suffer. In other words, whose fault is this. Because if it isn't anyone's fault, maybe it could happen to me.

And Jesus has such a funny statement. He doesn't answer this ever-present question, but instead says, *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.* How does that help us create distance in our minds and hearts from this situation? And the answer of course, is that it doesn't.

Friends, there are all sorts of bad theologies out there about why people suffer. You may hear folks say that people get what they deserve, so whatever suffering people face must be their own fault. Others may say that suffering is part of God's plan for us. But the truth is that suffering is not God's will or in God's plan.

It is not God's will that some suffer, or get hurt, and others do not. So why do innocent people suffer? Because suffering is part of this fallen world.

It's not all that surprising that the people hearing Jesus that day couldn't understand what he was saying. We still wrestle with these big questions about suffering here and now today. So Jesus tells them a story about a fig tree. Now what is the purpose of a fig tree? To grow figs! To produce fruit. But this particular fig tree hadn't produced, not just for one or two seasons, but for three whole years. So a man looks at it one day and says, well if its not going to do what its

supposed to do, I can chop it down, at least get the wood and start over again. But the gardener pleads with the man to give it one more year. To let him tend to it some more.

The truth is that we are all sinners. That if tragedies really happened to us because we sinned, then friends, we all deserve for it to happen to us. But instead, God knows the soil of our lives. God knows that we cannot save ourselves or reverse our own barrenness. So God is gracious enough to bring fruit from our lives. The fruit of repentance. The fruit of new life. The fruit of the Kingdom.

We all crave safety and security. We want to know who is responsible for something. Friends, it was not the Galileans who sinned, it was Pilate, but no one wanted to say that. So instead, they tried to rationalize everything in their mind, instead of realizing that sometimes tragedies happen that are Radom. And other times there are tragedies that could have been prevented like this one. Not by the people who were killed, but by those around who let it happen and by Pilate who made it happen.

As if the weight of all of this sorrow was not enough to bear, Jesus continues on to Jerusalem and all of a sudden the Pharisees tell him that something like what happened to the Galileans may happen to him. For Herod wants to kill him.

To which Jesus replies that it is impossible for prophets to be killed outside of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, this holy city to which he is headed. Jerusalem the place where he knows that death is waiting for him in. Jerusalem, the place his heart has tender compassion towards, but will turn its back and not receive his compassion for. Jerusalem, the place of heartache and sadness. And the place he laments over now.

Brothers and sisters, while Jesus may not have answered all of our questions about suffering in this passage of scripture, he knows what its like to suffer. He knows what its like to experience tragedy.

So where is the hope? The hope is that our Savior has been there, dear children of God. The hope is in the fact that Jesus is saying to the Pharisees to go and tell Herod that while the darkness of this world is trying to assert domination and control, that God will win. For God can redeem even the hardest tragedies in our lives to bring forth life. That the worst thing is not the last thing. That even those places and seasons of barrenness in our life can be made new, not by our own rationalization, but only by the mighty grace of God.

That is why we can hear about the awful things on the news and not respond by shifting blame, but instead by allowing our hearts to break open with the compassion of God. Where is our hope during the darkest times? My friends, our hope is in the God who loves and redeems and makes new, alone. Amen.