



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
[www.trinitylutheran.ca](http://www.trinitylutheran.ca)

## CHURCH AT HOME

### **Announcements:**

Welcome to Trinity's worship resource for March 20, 2022, celebrating the Third Sunday in Lent.

Pastor Jack Dressler (**519-250-7210**) is our interim Pastor. Please contact him for any pastoral needs.

**\*\* No Wednesday Lenten Service \*\*** and  
**\*\* There will be NO Maundy Thursday service \*\***

### **Pastor Jack will be leading the following services:**

March 27

Palm Sunday April 10

**\*\* There will be NO Maundy Thursday service \*\***

Good Friday April 15

Easter April 17

**The University Food Bank is struggling to keep their shelves full for their students. During our Lenten journey, let us reach out in love. For the season of Lent, please bring canned food items (beans, fruit, tuna, soup), granola/energy bars, crackers, juice boxes, any other nonperishable food items to church with you. They need our help. We can show God's love to them through our actions.**

Thank you again for your support for Trinity. Please continue to mail in cheques, or drop them off in the church's mailbox or make your donation either through PAR or through the Donate button on the church's website, at "[www.trinitylutheran.ca](http://www.trinitylutheran.ca)".

### **Introduction**

The warnings are plentiful and blunt on the third Sunday in Lent. Cut it out or get cut down! The warnings are accompanied by God's invitation to attentiveness: "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live." The landowner's ultimatum is forestalled by the gardener's readiness to till the ground one more year. That is good news for all of us. Thanks be to God!

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism.*

In the name of God, who makes a way in the wilderness, walks with us, and guides us in our pilgrimage. **Amen.**

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Holy One,

**we confess that we have wandered far from you, we have not trusted your promises, we have ignored your prophets in our own day, we have squandered our inheritance of grace, we have failed to recognize you in our midst.**

**Have mercy on us! Forgive us and turn us again to you. Teach us to follow in your ways, assure us again of your love, and help us to love our neighbor. Amen.**

Beloved in Christ, the Word draws near to you, and all who call out to God shall be saved. In Jesus, God comes to you again and again and gathers you under wings of love.

In ✝ Jesus' name, your sins are forgiven. God journeys with you and teaches you how to live in love. **Amen.**

### **Worship**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! **And also with you!**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your word and obey it, and bring your saving love to fruition in our lives, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### **Gospel Acclamation**

Jesus began to proclaim, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

### **First Reading: Isaiah 55:1-9**

*To those who have experienced long years in exile, the return to their homeland is a celebration of abundant life. God calls them into an everlasting covenant of love. Those who return to God will enjoy new life and forgiveness, because God's ways are not our ways.*

<sup>1</sup>Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

<sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

<sup>5</sup>See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup>Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

<sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### **Psalm: Psalm 63:1-8**

*O God, eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you.*

<sup>1</sup>O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where  
there is no water.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place,  
that I might behold your power and your glory.

<sup>3</sup>For your steadfast love is better than life itself; my lips shall give you praise.

<sup>4</sup>**So will I bless you as long as I live and lift up my hands in your name.**

<sup>5</sup>My spirit is content, as with the richest of foods,  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,

<sup>6</sup>**when I remember you up-on my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches.**

<sup>7</sup>For you have been my helper, and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

<sup>8</sup>**My whole being clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.**

### **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

*Paul uses images from Hebrew Scriptures and prophecy to speak the truth of Jesus Christ: He is our rock, our water, our food, and our drink. Christ is the living sign of God's faithfulness.*

<sup>1</sup>I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9**

*Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.*

<sup>1</sup>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>[Jesus] 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.’”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **The Sermon: (Dena Peifer)**

Did you know, there is a fancy theological term for the question, “How can a good and loving God allow bad things to happen to people?” That term is theodicy. Don’t worry, there won’t be a test. You don’t have to remember the term. But it’s the first thing we think of when catastrophes happen, especially when they happen to us, or to people we know.

Why does God allow evil to thrive? How can God just stand by and watch as hundreds of people are killed by a cyclone ripping through Mozambique and Madagascar, or while dozens of people are gunned down in Christchurch, New Zealand? How can someone who has never smoked a single cigarette die from lung cancer? How does a perfectly healthy young mother, who has devoted her life to ministry, die abruptly from an infection? Where is God in all that suffering?

These aren’t rhetorical questions. Good people, people who have trusted in God their entire lives, have asked these hard questions. And it is easy to blame God for circumstances that are beyond our control. If God is really in charge, and he lets terrible things happen to people, the only logical explanation must be that they somehow deserved it. God must be punishing us for something we’ve done when bad things happen, right? It’s the only way we can make sense of it all.

Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem (Lk 9:53) and we’ve been listening to him along the journey. Last week, we heard him call out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and experts

in Jewish law while he was a dinner guest in a Pharisee's house. And we had to admit that Jesus was calling out our own hypocrisy, too.

After dinner at the Pharisee's house, Jesus gives a long sermon. It runs through all of chapter 12 and comes to something of a climax in the passage we read today. Jesus speaks. Listen to him.

*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 around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Luke 13:1-9)*

Don't be fooled by catastrophe and tragedy. Those terrible things that happen to people, like having a tower fall on you, or your dairy farm wiped out by flooding – things like that can make you question where God is in the midst of suffering. It's easy to lash out at God and blame the Creator of the Universe for allowing bad things to happen.

After all, if we blame God, it takes the responsibility off us. We can allow ourselves to be distracted by the things we can't control, instead of doing something about the things we can. "Why did this happen?' it's too easy to ask, wringing our hands as we sit on the sidelines and do nothing, changing nothing, influencing and affecting nothing." It's easy to shrug our shoulders and say that it's all God's fault, and I can't do anything about it.

But when his followers ask Jesus the theodicy question, he makes it clear that catastrophic events aren't God's punishment. Those people weren't any worse sinners than you or me.

David Lose writes, "These events – whether in the first or twenty-first century – aren't ultimately about guilt or punishment or the origin and cause of evil. They are just events, some of which we can't do much about, while others we can, but what remains

is that no amount of discussing or debating ... helps us get about the things we can influence." When bad things happen, it's a wake-up call to repent, to turn our eyes toward Jesus.

"Luke mentions repentance more often than any other book in the Bible. In fact, close to more often than all of the rest of the New Testament combined." Repentance is a major theme during the season of Lent. We talk about repentance as an act of turning completely around 180 degrees, to leave our sin behind us.

We also say that repenting requires being sorry for our sin. But repentance is much more than telling God we are sorry. Someone tweeted this week, "An apology without change is just manipulation." And while that comment might sound like it was just intended to spark some argument on Twitter, there is some truth to it. Repentance isn't just saying you're sorry for what you've done wrong. It requires turning, changing.

But repentance is also not just behavior modification: "So often we think repentance needs to be some dramatic sin we need to cease doing or some kind of bad behavior we need to turn away from." That might be true for some of us. But it's more likely that you don't consider yourself that kind of a sinner. Your sins aren't very dramatic. You can manage your own behavior without much help.

Maybe it's time to reframe our idea of repentance. In the book "Listen to Him", J. D. Walt writes, "As we near Jerusalem, we must think of repentance in terms of who we are running to more than what we turn away from. It's time to flip repentance."

So instead of heading down the rabbit hole of theodicy, and blaming God for all the bad things that happen to us, or offering hollow apologies, or thinking of repentance as some sort of self-help program to improve our behavior, we need to focus with laser intensity on the voice of Jesus. Our repentance needs to become a deep desire to listen to him, especially when we find ourselves in the middle of a catastrophe.

This story isn't really about theodicy. It's about repentance. And that's been true all through this season of Lent, as we have tuned our ears to listen to Jesus, to get close to him. Here, he says it plainly – not once, but twice: "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

When Jesus says, "Unless you repent you will die as they did" he doesn't mean a tower is going to fall on you. Your blood is not going to be mixed with some animal's sacrificial blood. And, unlike some scholars, I also don't think "as they did" suggests that they were somehow not right with God when they died, maybe because their tragic end was so abrupt, they didn't have a chance to confess their sins and be absolved of them.

I think Jesus was making the point that the tragedy of these deaths was not in their gruesomeness, but in their pointlessness. Unless you repent, in other words, your life will be as pointless as their deaths were. If you want your life to have a point, if you want your life to have a clear purpose, repentance is the key.

When we flip repentance, and think of it as turning toward Jesus, instead of just turning away from sin, something else happens. Instead of repentance being all about what we do to make ourselves acceptable to God, we suddenly find ourselves basking in God's grace. "Repentance is a response to the goodness God has done, not a requirement to merit God's goodness."

Jill Duffield writes about attending a gathering where several members of the group had recently received their GEDs. As she listened to others rejoice with these new graduates, she learned that many of the adult students who were receiving their diplomas had been labeled 'unreachable.'

She writes, "What a pronouncement to make about anyone. Unreachable. Beyond hope. No need to try any harder or any more. Impossible to get to them. Unreachable. How often do we label people unreachable and give up on them? Look, we say, no figs, no fruit, useless. We communicate in word or action or inaction: cut them down, they are wasting soil that could be better utilized."

And then she goes on to ask, "How often have we felt written off, labeled unreachable, been cut down to size, dismissed or rendered invisible?"

How does it feel to be considered a problem? What's it like to know others think you are wasting space that someone else could put to better use? Our hospitals and nursing homes and jails are filled with people who might think they've been written off, dismissed, or rendered invisible. As teen suicide rates climb, we could probably add schools to that list of institutions where people have lost hope.

Yet, Jesus says, "Wait a minute. Let me do some fertilizing here. Let me dig into the hardened earth and loosen it up a bit so the roots can breathe. Let's not give up quite yet. There's hope that this life can become fruitful."

Christ calls us to the kind of repentance that turns our attention away from ourselves and points our attention toward God. Instead of trying to improve ourselves in order to merit God's love, Christ offers that love to us freely and says, "Here, receive this gift. Let me enrich your soil with some manure. Let your repentance become the compost that fertilizes new life."



God's judgment is a given, whatever tragedies we may experience. The answer to tragedy is repentance toward God. When bad things happen, Jesus encourages us to turn to God instead of blaming God.

Those poor souls who died violent deaths didn't deserve to die like that because of some evil they had done. Bad things happen. But how we respond determines whether or not our lives will be as pointless as those deaths. We can wallow in self-pity, or we can repent toward God, and live.

Jesus is moving closer to Jerusalem. He knows his window of time to teach us is shrinking. With each step we take as we follow him, our listening will need to become more intense, so that we can hear him clearly. Let us repent towards God, and live. **AMEN.**

### **Peace**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

### **The Prayers of Intercession**

*Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need.*

We pray for the church around the world in all its forms: for pastors, deacons, bishops, chaplains, and mission developers; for church councils, committee chairs, and all lay ministry leaders; for congregations that contemplate difficult decisions about the future of their ministry. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

For the health of this planet and the well-being of its creatures: for lands impacted by droughts and at risk of wildfires; for fig trees and vineyards that produce fruit for our nourishment and delight; for animal habitats threatened by climate change. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

For those called into positions of civic responsibility: for judges, attorneys, and court administrators tasked with uncovering truth and delivering justice; for activists and community leaders who cast a vision of a more compassionate and equitable society. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

For those who call upon you for mercy: for all who live in poverty and experience hunger; for any who feel tested beyond their strength; for those who are hospitalized or near death, and for all in need of healing. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

For the advocacy efforts of this congregation: for those whose faith leads them to speak difficult truths and engage in difficult conversations with policymakers; for those who promote mercy over vengeance or retaliation. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

God of presence, bless those of this community who cannot be with us this morning, and those who walk with them, especially:

***In Residence:*** Margaret; Maria; Stan; Katie; Katherine; Cordelle; Dorothy

***Needing our prayers:*** Ed; Pastor Mike & Patti, Donna; Sharon B

***Friends of our Members Needing our prayers:*** Audrey; Greg; Paul; Hilda; Mary

**...and all members who may have needs unknown to us**

And all those we name in our hearts...

Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

For those whose earthly journeys have ended, we give thanks. With all the saints, we praise you for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

*Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:*

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Benediction**

You are children of God, anointed with the oil of gladness and strengthened for the journey. Almighty God, motherly, majestic, and mighty, bless you this day and always.

**Amen.**

### **Dismissal**

Go in peace. Jesus meets you on the way. **Thanks be to God.**