



## St John Lutheran Church

1017 Montana  
Libby, MT 59923  
(406)293-4024

Luke 13: 1-9

You Are In This, Too"

**During this Season** of Lent we talk a lot about repentance. **No Christian ought** to stand before God and declare, "I have repented," as if your repentance comes about only once in a lifetime... **like a** high school graduation or an appendectomy. **The Christian can** only confess, "**Here and now I repent. I may have also repented long ago, but that was then and I have also sinned in countless ways since then. Here and now I repent I continually repent and continually ask God's forgiveness.**"

**As the hearers** of the Gospel weave their way through St. Luke's story... **they catch** the repeated warning that Jesus of Nazareth faces a bloody future. **Even in the** days of His infancy, our Lord was marked for death by Simeon's prophecy that "**this child is destined to be a sign that will be spoken against**" (Luke 2:34).

**The brightness of** His Epiphany Baptism and the Fatherly voice that spoke assurance from heaven (Luke 3:22) are soon followed by the First Gospel of Lent... **that of** our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. **Here the Son** of God does battle with the devil... **God's ancient** adversary from Eden... **but here** in the wilderness they fight only by way of a skirmish. **The ultimate fight... the fight** unto death... **waits in** the future, in Jerusalem. **St. Luke casts** a shadow over our Lord's successes in the wilderness with his words, "**When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left [Jesus] until an opportune time**" (Luke 4:13).

**Up from the** desert, our Lord then travels to Nazareth, where again His death is warned but not yet fulfilled. **At Nazareth, Jesus** anticipates His future treatment in Jerusalem... **here He** declares by His actions that not only Jerusalem... **but all** of Israel willingly kills the prophets and stones those sent to her (Luke 13:34)... **here at** Nazareth He accepts the same rejection that He will later receive... **here He** is taken out of the city to a stony hilltop to be executed. **Yet once He** has allowed His own townspeople to anticipate and act out the pending details His Passion... **He parts** company with them by walking through the crowd and continuing on His way. **The rejection at** Nazareth would be neither the last nor the greatest.

**At His transfiguration... which we** marked just three weeks ago... **our Lord's** death for our salvation became the topic of His conversation as He stood on the mountain top and discussed with Moses and Elijah "**His exodus, which He was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem**" (Luke 9:31). **That word "fulfillment"** alerts you to the fact that Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion, His death and His resurrection were not accidental twists of fate... **but they** are the stuff of prophecy. **They are the** substance of promise. **They are the** pinnacle of each Gospel account... **and the** very purpose for which our Lord was born of the Virgin Mary.

**As the hearers** of the Gospel weave their way through St. Luke's story... **they catch** the repeated warning that Jesus of Nazareth faces a bloody future. **Yet here in** today's Gospel, our Lord refuses to let this story be only about His death. **Just as surely** as He said to those who told him about Pilate's ghastly action... **Jesus says** to all people, "**Unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13:3). You are in this, too! This Gospel is not only about My death and resurrection, but it is about your death and your resurrection. If you refuse to allow yourself to be made one flesh with My death and resurrection, if you refuse the life of Lenten repentance to which I now call you, you too will perish.**"

**No Christian ought** to stand before God and declare, **"I have repented,"** as if your repentance comes about only once in a lifetime. **Your repentance is** not something that happened to you once, long ago... **but it is** the sum and substance of your faith. **Repentance is** the respiration of your daily life... **as you** exhale by confession of your sins... **and inhale** that sweet, refreshing Gospel of forgiveness won for you by your Lord. **A living person** would never say, **"I once breathed long ago."** No, a person would say instead, **"I am right now breathing and would like very much to continue doing so."** In the same way, a Christian will never claim, **"I once repented and now I am done with it."** A Christian says instead, **"I am right now repentant of my many sins, I want God's forgiveness, and I will continue wanting and needing his forgiveness so long as I remain in this life."**

**St. Luke gets** a little bit crafty with us in this Gospel. **Usually, whenever he** speaks of people coming to Jesus, St. Luke gives us an idea if they are friend or enemy... **believer or rejecter. He will often** tell us that it was Jesus' disciples who said this... **or it** was the scribes and Pharisees who said that. **But not today. Today's Gospel is** part of a sermon that Jesus preached to **"a crowd of many thousands"** gathered around Him (Luke 12:1)... **a crowd** in which we cannot distinguish believer from unbeliever. **Jesus first began** speaking only to His disciples... **but soon** the people in the crowd got involved in the conversation (Luke 12:13). **"Now there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices"** (Luke 13:1), but St. Luke will not tell us anything about these tattletales... **whether they** were faithful followers of Jesus or enemies who wanted to trap Him or just people who were there to watch His miracles and be amazed.

**Jesus says to** the crowd of believers and unbelievers alike, **"Unless you repent, you too will all perish"** (Luke 13:3, 5). **You would not** think that the incarnate **"God of all comfort"** (2 Corinthians 1:3) would be capable such coldness of voice. **It appears that** there is not much compassion here at all (neither divine nor human), not much grace and mercy... **but only** a ruthless verbal attack against an unsuspecting crowd: **"Unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

**This Gospel... this fiery Jesus... this threatening** wind of Divine Judgment... **none of** these give us much room to wriggle. **They snap tightly** upon the neck and they draw us up... **as a** man would do with a dog on a leash. **They take this** story of another person's life and death and they stick you into it. **Your life is** on the line here. **Your existence is** at stake. **Your eternal tomorrow** rides on the words of the man who speaks in this Gospel. **And this is** a good Lenten Gospel... **because the** whole of Lent boils down to this one sermon from the soon-to-be-crucified Lord: **"Unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

**Your Lord's message** is very simple and very brutal... **yet it** is also very compassionate and very Lenten. **In this Gospel,** Jesus looks upon His harassed and helpless sheep and He declares to them, **"My life for your life! Your life and your death are the stuff of ancient history. Unless you repent, you shall perish-not because of any specific wrong you may have done, but because sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. Unless you repent you shall perish because your life apart from Me already is a living death, an animated damnation, fruit from a poisoned tree."**

**"My life for your life!"** cries your Lord. **"Your life and your death are the stuff of ancient history, but so also is My life and My death. I am the one foretold by the prophets. I am the one who comes to bear the sin of the world. I am the one whose death is anticipated and promised in every step of My life. I am the one who comes to die so that you will never die. Unless you repent, you too will all perish. But with the divine gift of repentance, life imperishable is yours!"**

**Now there were** some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **Jesus answered,** **"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all**

**perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

**Without God's gift of repentance... it will not matter if you die tragically... as did those people who died at Pilate's hand... or if you die of natural occurrences... as those people died when the tower fell upon them. Without God's gift of repentance... you will face your own judgment with defiance rather than with contrition. Without God's gift of repentance, "you too will all perish."**

**Yet the One** who calls for your repentance is the very One who enables and provides it. **The repentance to which Jesus calls you is found only in the great exchange that He here offers you: "My life for your life! You are in this too! These Gospel accounts are the story of My death, but by My death I have come to deliver you from your own death!"**

**Repentance is sorrow** over your sin and faith in Jesus. **Repentance lives only** in the fact that Jesus perishes for you... **so that** you will not likewise perish. **Repentance is the** currency exchange where God Himself hands you currency that cannot rust and cannot be stolen away from you. **Repentance is where** God Himself gathers up from you the only currency you have... **the limp** and frayed currency of your sin... **and He** gives you the currency of eternal life.

**No Christian stands** before God and says, **"I once repented. I don't need to do it again."** That is like saying, **"I received my salary last week-I don't need it this week."** No, the Christian never says, **"I repented."** The Christian can only say, **"I now repent. I now need Your forgiveness of sins. I now need your deliverance from death, so that I will not perish."**

**So, we kneel and pray and repent. We repent...not out of the fear of punishment from our God. We pray and repent because we know that we are forgiven in Christ... we are forgiven in Christ!! Such prayers as these get answered by God long before they are ever even uttered. The forgiveness that He pours out for you in the death and resurrection of His Son has completely washed your sins clean even before you realized you have them.**

**By calling you to repentance, your Lord this day says to you, "You are in this, too. But I give you My innocence for your guilt and My life for you life. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"** (John 11:25-26). In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen

Lent 3C, 2007

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Libby, Montana