

Sunday, March 24, 2019 – Fourth Sunday in Lent
“Turning Around”

Luke 13: 1-9

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Adapted from CJ

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Coming home is good when you are welcomed. This might be your family but even if you live alone, your pet, your coworkers, your church family – when you’re welcomed back it’s nice, isn’t it? Repentance is like coming home. To repent is to come home to Jesus in love and acceptance. But more about that later. Let’s go back to the Gospel reading.

Two tragedies have happened. The first involves murderous, heinous sacrilege. Jesus is told about Roman soldiers under Pontius Pilate who apparently murdered Galilean Jews, probably over the Passover, while they were making their sacrifices in the temple precincts. The blood of the slaughtered lambs mixes with the blood of the slaughtered victims. This story becomes a launching point for Jesus to teach about repentance. He ties this story together with another current event – a tower in Siloam that collapsed and killed eighteen unsuspecting people. But did you hear what Jesus said? Were the Galileans slaughtered making their sacrifices worse sinners? No. Were the eighteen victims worse sinners? No. So in these cases these tragedies were not because of some great sin.

We have those tragedies too. I get letters CHOC, Children’s Hospital of Orange County. The children there have various illnesses, including cancer. The letter is asking for a donation and a child is usually pictured. No hair, hospital gown, but a smile on the face. Are these children worse sinners than other kids? Jesus says... No. I saw a story of a young couple in Texas, killed in a helicopter crash two hours after their wedding. Are they worse than only newlyweds? Jesus says... no. Those California wildfires were awful last year – one neighbor’s house and all their worldly possessions are left in an ashen heap, the house next door is fine. Is one neighbor more sinful than the other? Jesus says... no.

So why did they happen? We're waiting for the answer from Jesus. But he doesn't give us one. No, he ignores the abstract, "Why do bad things like this happen?" and goes straight to the lives of those listening. And to us. He turns and looks at us. Unless we repent, we too will perish. And this perish is even more catastrophic than the tragedies that brought death. This perishing is eternal. Forever being separated from God. Never being able to come home to his love. Jesus is taking us out of the abstract "why?" and turning us back to ourselves. Calling us to repent, to come home.

Now, maybe you've heard of repentance defined as turning, and it is that. We turn from one direction and head another, 180 degrees. We are to turn from anything and everything that gets in the way of our relationship with the Lord. If it disrupts our connection to Jesus, turn away from it. And it's not just the big things like murder, adultery, or embezzlement.

No, more often it's the everyday things we need to repent of. The way we budget leaves us living from paycheck to paycheck with little to give to those in need. We have the things we want, but ignore the generosity Jesus wants us to do. So we turn away from that greed and come home to Jesus. Our anger leaves us seething, resentful and shaming of others, with no room for grace, understanding, forgiveness, personal responsibility or restoration. We hold onto our righteous indignation but without the compassion Jesus wants us to show. So we turn away from our anger and come home to Jesus. Our complaining leaves us ungrateful and critical. I'm looking for others to take responsibility for me. I turn away from my complaint and come home to Jesus. Do you see how repentance works? You turn away from something that is pulling you away from Jesus and turn around to come back home to him.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of repentance. The young son wants his inheritance early. His father gives it to him. He heads off to another city to live. He wastefully runs through his money – the other brother insinuates it was on wild and reckless living but that's just a guess – bad investments? Too much house? Fell to some Ponzi scheme? Who knows. Do you see what the big problem is? As

Americans, we think about how he wasted the money. We imagine what type of sinful living he indulged in. But the bigger problem happened earlier. He. Left. Home. He turned his back on his home.

Finally, he realizes what he has done. He's feeding pigs and they have better food than he does. So repentance has begun. He turns away from what has led him so far from home and heads back. His father sees him coming. He runs to meet him. New robe. New sandals. New ring. Celebration! He's come home. Repentance is coming home. Repentance is being welcomed home in love and acceptance.

Repentance is coming home to Jesus, and he's waiting with open arms. His nail-scarred hands welcome you with his love. He stretched out those arms on the cross to provide the forgiveness for all that we need to turn away from. His open arms have forgiven the greed, fear, lust, impatience and any other everyday sin that gets in the way of our relationship with him. When we come home to Jesus, he is risen from the dead and restores us to his family. He brings us home once again. And he gives us his Holy Spirit to renew our lives. Generosity, patience, trust, contentment, peace, and kindness become the fruits of repentance in our lives when we come home. Yes, coming home to Jesus's love is so needed. Coming home to Jesus's acceptance is so good. Nothing is more wonderful than to be welcomed home by Jesus.

And we need to come home every day. Martin Luther's evening prayer helps us do that: "I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; *and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong*, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen." If you don't have a bedtime prayer routine, consider this prayer that brings us home to Jesus, to sleep in his forgiving, welcoming love.

I know this will sound funny to some of you but I am ever more aware of my age. I find myself more and more saying stuff like, "It's been 25 years since I saw that movie," and "When I was your age." I'm more frequently in the dark about actors and musicians and other pop culture references. Our

school kids think I'm pretty old. Forty is just a couple years away. I figure I have lived close to half my life – God willing, a little less, but certainly 40% at least – my next birthday will be exactly 40% of the way to age 95. So I'll be *very* generous and say there's 60% yet to live... but it could be 98 percent lived. The cancer cells might this very moment be spreading in my body. The plane I'm in crashes. The stray bullet finds me. A routine errand ends in disaster. Heart attack, stroke, aneurysm. For many of us, we don't know when and how that moment of death will come. But when it does, Jesus wants us to be home with him. He's calling us to always come home to him.

When I travel I often use a map app – I'm good with directions but like to avoid traffic. If I miss a turn, it says, "Turn around when possible." With Jesus, it's always possible to turn around and come home to Jesus, and he welcomes us with love and forgiveness. Repentance is coming home to Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.