

Sermon Notes: March 20, 2022

Focus: Metanoia

Lectionary Readings

We want answers. I want answers. Why suffering? Why Ukraine? Why death? Why is Lebron in LA?

Jesus is always asking people to do a “U-turn” toward God throughout the gospel. But there are so many obstacles - then and now. One of those obstacles shows up in the gospel. Pilate killed some of Jesus’ neighbors: “Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifice” (Luke 13:1). To add insult to injury Pilate made these murders part of a religious ritual to terrorize the locals. Jesus may have known some of the executed personally.

I find nothing redemptive in Pilate. For some inexplicable reason (to me), we want Pilate to be sort of a Christian. He was troubled at the thought of killing an innocent man, but those darn Jews tied his hands, the logic goes.

Pilate was not some weakling who would have followed Jesus if only he had a different job, but a gleeful murderer who treated people like pawns in his boardgame of life. He was as bad any ancient Pharaoh or modern Russian general who bombs Ukrainian cities into starvation.

With that in mind, hear today’s story. People told Jesus about “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their “sacrifices.” Jesus responds:

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.

Metanoia That is the fancy word for ‘repent.’ I really love this word. I love the concept and the word picture it describes. Jesus wants his audience in grand AA serenity prayer style to look at their minds and hearts: *God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and Wisdom to know the difference.*

Metanoia is Greek for the Hebrew *shuv* which at core means a U turn back to God. Returning to God is a “head trip” Literally. *Meta* means “beyond.” *noia* (root nous) means “mind.” To do a U turn, you get outside your head and turn around. Jesus wants them and us to do a U turn back to God. Otherwise, something essential will perish. Jesus is not saying repentance will make them escape the death of the body. But he proposes that repentance will make them nimble, responsive, even fruitful.

Now the fruit tree. At the end of this Gospel reading, there is a fig tree that has not produced fruit in three years. The fig tree is a metaphor for the human heart. This fruitless tree would already become trash to any arborist. However, Jesus says three years more. Even wrecked hearts deserve some extra TLC. Jesus is blunt: God does not give up. You can always U-turn back to life.

Todd