

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Evil lurks all around us. We cannot escape it, not in this life. Wars, destruction, death happen. Wicked people exist. Assaults, murder, rape, robbery happen. Accidents, injury, death happen. Natural disasters, loss of property, loss of life happen. Human errors, unintended consequences, unintended harm happen.

In dealing with the consequences of all these, a common question arises: “Why?” “Why me?” “Why us?” Maybe too the question: “What did I do that this is happening to me?” And those sometimes turn into broader questions by the victims and by observers: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” “Where is God in all of this?” “Is God really good who allows evil to happen?” “Is God really all-powerful who cannot prevent evil from happening?” “Is God really God?”

The problem of evil in a world ruled by a good and just God, sometimes called “theodicy,” is a particularly thorny problem for Christians, and many theologians have taken it up. This gospel text makes me think about it. I’m sure this sermon will not do it justice, but your pastor offers these humble thoughts.

First, we are Lutherans who believe the Scriptures despite whatever seeming contradictions swirl around us. So that, when the Scriptures say that God is almighty (Gen. 17:1), when it says, “*nothing will be impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37), when Jesus says, “*with God all things are possible*” (Matt. 19:26), we believe the Scripture. God is all-powerful. And when it says that “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16), that He is “*gracious and merciful ... and abounding in steadfast love*” (Ps. 145:8), that He is “*Good and upright*” (Ps. 25:8), and that He takes “*no pleasure in the death of the wicked*” (Eze. 33:11), we believe that, too. The Lord is God, good and powerful — there is no other.

Second, it may seem contradictory in the face of evil things, but the problem of evil does not point the finger at God. God created the world “*good*” and “*very good*” (Gen. 1:10, 31); He did not corrupt it; He did not bring sin and death into the world. Adam did that with the tempting voice of the ancient serpent. In desiring to know good and evil, Adam disobeyed God. He fell from his created perfection and was filled with a desire to sin, a desire that has been passed down from parents to children ever since. We men don’t just sin; we ARE SINNERS even from conception and birth.

The fault is ours, not God’s. As the prophet Ezekiel said, “*your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just*” (Eze. 33:17). Bad things happen because sinners, who do bad things, fill this world. And by nature, we’re numbered among them; we’re “*poor, miserable, sinner[s]*,” which we acknowledge because God tells us it’s so: “*None is righteous, no, not one; ... no one does good, not even one. ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:10, 12, 23).

Third, more than just man was corrupted by sin. In Adam's fall, all creation was subjected to futility, St. Paul says. Creation groans because of what sin has done to it (Rom. 8:18ff), for it became enthralled in corruption. This corruption accounts for the natural disasters we experience. They're not "acts of God," who is good. Sin is to blame, which put creation in chains from which it could not free itself. It must be freed.

And it has been along with us in the freedom that comes through God's redemption in Christ Jesus. St. Paul affirms it: we are "*the children of promise ... children... of the free woman ... For freedom Christ has set us free*" (Gal. 4:28, 31; 5:1). And yet, the creation must wait for Christ's return and "*the revealing of the sons of God*" (Rom. 8:19), even as we must wait for our own "*adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*" (Rom. 8:23). What is ours now we will have in its fullness on the last day. In the meantime, we groan along with creation surrounded by this corruption.

This corruption we see in the Gospel lesson, too, Jesus giving an answer to the common question: "What did I do to deserve this?" Or "What did they do?" To be sure, there are often serious consequences to the sins we commit. Driving drunk can have serious consequences: accidents that hurt yourself and others; trouble with the law — direct consequences for sin. But other times, when we suffer there is no effecting sin to point to.

Jesus had been teaching the people about "interpreting the time." You can look to the sky and see that a rain is coming, or feel the south wind and know that warm temperatures follow, "*but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?*" (Luke 12:56), Jesus chided them. So some who were present asked Him: what "*about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices?*"

Here is one of those cases. Were "*these Galileans ... worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?*" Jesus asked. Jesus answered His own question: "*No, I tell you.*" Jesus Himself offered another example: a tower in Jerusalem, "*the tower in Siloam fell [on] and killed*" "*eighteen*" people. Jesus asked again, "*do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?*" Again He answered: "*No, I tell you.*" Neither of these is an example of suffering the consequence of a particular sin. God wasn't punishing the Galileans for something they had done, or those residents of Jerusalem for something that they had done.

But sin is surely still in view, Pilate's sin and sin's corruption in our world beginning with Adam and to which we all contribute. And so, with these words: "*unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,*" Jesus called those people to repentance, and us, too, in our day. So, I also say to you: Repent! Acknowledge your

sinfulness. You know God's commandments. Acknowledge the things you do, say, or think that you shouldn't and the things you didn't do, say, or think that you should — sins of commission and omission. Acknowledge that you don't even recognize all of your sins, as David declares: "*Who can discern his errors?*" (Ps. 19:12)

And then turn to Christ in faith. Trust that His perfection substitutes for your imperfection, that His suffering, scorn, shame, and death was done for you to assuage God's wrath for your sin. Trust that this sacrificial Lamb bore the sins of the world on His shoulders and shed His blood that you might be forgiven (John 1:29). Trust that He has canceled the record of debt that stood against you with its legal demands, setting it aside by nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:14). Trust that Christ has triumphed over sin and its ugly consequences by His death and resurrection, and that the suffering that you still experience in this corrupt world and the death that you will pass through are but temporary and "*are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*" (Rom. 8:18). Trust that, by this faith, Christ's victory is now your victory and that "*tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword*" shall not "*separate [you] from the love of Christ*" (Rom. 8:35). Hope with Christian hope, not a mere wish but a sure confidence, that in Christ "*neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Repent, that you may not perish eternally. In this world, you will stumble and fall. In this world, you will experience the consequences of sin, your own and more generally. In this world, you will suffer and, at length, die. Trust in Jesus who promises that "*though [you] die, yet shall [you] live,*" and that actually, by living and believing in Him, you "*shall never die*" (John 11:25-26).

Repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance, keeping in mind that all your failures are covered by Jesus' perfection and cross. Indeed Jesus' cross brings comfort in the face of all suffering, for "why?" we ask. It's all for you. As Art Just writes, "One must view massacres and accidents from the perspective of the cross. The forgiveness of sins is present in the risen One, who remains present in his church through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. It is here that the suffering Christian meets the suffering Christ and sees in Christ's sufferings his own comfort, his peace, his redemption, and his life everlasting after his 'release' (4:18) from every pain in this world" (Just, Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51–24:53, p. 537). God grant you this comfort and hope for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.