

Sunday March 20, 2022

Third Sunday of Lent

Parishioner Reflection

By: Kerry Tucker

In today's Gospel, Jesus is told by some members of a crowd about certain Galileans who were killed by Pilate while offering sacrifices. In response he asks the crowd a question, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" (Luke 13: 1-2, NRSV). Part of Jesus' answer to them, "No, I tell you..." (Luke 13: 3), says, I think, that Jesus believes that that is exactly what he thought his audience was thinking. And that, for him, in thinking that, they were wrong.

He reinforces his point, by telling another story himself to the crowd about those who were killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam. And, in relation to this other calamity, he asks the crowd a question again, that is very similar to the first, "...do you think they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" Again, Jesus is implying, it seems, that this is what he thought the crowd was thinking. And the first part of his answer to this second similar question, "No, I tell you..." (Luke 13: 4-5, NRSV), again says that to think this is, for Jesus, wrong.

Is this type of wrong thinking, according to Jesus, still evident today? Do we still tend to look at tragedies, like these, as evidence that those who they happen to are more sinful than we are? Perhaps, in some sense, otherwise, why, according to the Wikipedia article about it, was a book like, "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People?", published in 1981, a New York Times bestseller for several months? The implication being that there may have been a tendency, not that long ago, in our part of the world to think that "bad things" should only happen to "bad people". In any case, if this is the way any of us still tends to think, it's not something Jesus condones here.

So, what, alternatively, was Jesus saying that the crowd he was talking to should think and/or do? The last parts of the answers Jesus gives to the crowd tells this, I think. The second part of both of Jesus' answers to the crowd are identical. Again, Jesus is using repetition to drive his point home. He says both times, "...but unless you repent you will all perish as they did" (Luke 13: 3, 5).

The alternative to judging their neighbours' sinfulness that Jesus thinks the crowd should opt for is, in my view, repenting of their own sins. But what does it mean to repent here? According to Oxford Languages, from a Google search using the phrase "repent meaning", repent means to "feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin." Similarly, The New Bible Dictionary, Second edition, says that the Greek words, usually translated "repent" in the

New Testament, generally, mean “to change one’s mind” and, therefore, as well, to “regret, feel remorse’ (i.e. over the view previously held)” (ed. Douglas J.D. 1018). However, the use of “repent” in the New Testament, generally, means even more than this because of the “influence” on it by one of the Hebrew words translated as “repent” in the Old Testament. That is, overall in the New Testament “repentance” is “not just [] a feeling sorry, or changing one’s mind, but [] a turning round, a complete alteration of the basic motivation and direction of one’s life” (ed. Douglas, J. D., 1018).

If this is what Jesus meant by “repent” in today’s Gospel reading, and I think it is, given the context, then perhaps it may, also, be seen as a call to us today who may be tempted to focus on our neighbours’ wrongdoing to, instead, focus on our own and turn from it and live.