

Grace, Mercy, and peace from God our father & our Lord Jesus Christ.

In September of my senior year in college I received a call from my mom, which I knew could mean nothing but bad news; my mom never called me at school. *My cousin Patrick, five years my junior was dead. Patrick had been out mowing the pasture with the old IH farmall tractor. For some reason or other he was backing up, hit a depression in the ground, fell backwards off the tractor and broke his neck. He was dead at the age of 17.*

The phone call left me numb. I had lived with Patrick's family during my summers in my mom's hometown for years. We'd laughed, teased, fought, and worked together like brothers only a month or so before, and now he was gone.

It was the first time in my nearly adult life that life forced me to take stock of my life. Did I tell everyone who mattered to me how important they were to me? They could be gone tomorrow. Sometimes a death causes us to sit up, take notice and question whether *our lives are headed somewhere and serving a meaningful end. Or are we just taking up space, serving no one, living out busy but empty days.*

This morning *Jesus tells us two stories that served as moments of reckoning* for the Jews in 1st Century Palestine: the collapse of the tower of Siloam and Pontius Pilate's brutal murder of Jews sacrificing in the temple. He uses these contemporary tragedies of his day *to address a very common question. Had those who die young or unexpectedly done*

something worse than everyone else to die in this way?

JESUS TELLS US “NO”.

It wasn't because of any specific crimes or sins that led to their unforeseen death. *It wasn't anything unique to them, or their past, or what they believed,*(or anything that separates one person in this world from another). No, it wasn't any of those things. ***It was because of what that they had in common*** with everyone else. ***It was because THEY WERE MORTAL – GOING (DESTINED) TO DIE. (JUST LIKE JESUS WAS GOING TO DIE.)***

Jesus tells them that unless they repent, change their ways, that same death is all that awaits them.

BUT WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY THIS? *Everyone is going to die, even the truly faithful will die, BUT WILL THEY LIVE?*

Jesus turns the question around: *from “were they worse sinners” to “will our lives and deaths be as tragic and meaningless as theirs were?”*

Will we grow in life or just waste our lives seeking to delay and avoid our inevitable deaths?

Will we seek the approval of those around us or the approval of the one who has made us?

Sometimes a great tragedy, either personal or public, causes us to *take stock* of our lives. ***With this in mind, Jesus tells the story about a fig***

tree being given time, and space to grow, so that it might bear fruit:

"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardner, "See here, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?"

*He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it, and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, **but if not you can cut it down.**"*

Confronted by death, we all face a mandate: not that we make our days, pleasant, but that we make them count. Our lives are no more certain, no more immortal than those of the people on the two recent airline crashes, or the victims of the senseless act of racism in the mosques of New Zealand, or my cousin Patrick, our sisters in Christ June Broeckel and Maxine Coberly, our brother in Christ Chuck Nelson –who've all died recently.

We can live our lives through without making any difference, without caring for anyone else, afraid to live for dying. ***But when we are shaken by tragedy or confronted by Jesus, we are reminded of the choice facing us. Who and what will we serve? Life or death?***

The goodness in all and everything as God intended **or** the evil of ignorantly serving our own fear.

Living as God's children is like deciding when to start a family.

If we wait until everything is right – until we have enough money, security, parenting skill, etc. – we would never have any.

But *when we boldly have children anyway, we experience a joy that we would never know otherwise.*

Isaiah reminds the returning exiles and all who believe that *we must return to the source of life to receive abundantly from this life.* In God's presence, which we now have access to through prayer, the Word and Sacraments because of Jesus Christ, we can be filled so that we can truly live life *without counting the cost to ourselves constantly.* God's love is richly given, when we receive it freely, we can give love freely, and our lives and the lives of those around us are enriched.

Bearing fruit was the reason that the fig tree had been given the opportunity to live. "We've been given the opportunity to live only because Jesus, the gardener, desires us to live fully in him and bear fruit."

So in this lenten season we ask God to grant us the grace to turn from inconsequential lives and return to the source of our lives, that we may ***LIVE IN CHRIST'S LOVE AND LIVE OUT CHRIST'S LOVE.***

AMEN !!!