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Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Repentant Eyes are Compassionate Eyes”
Text: Luke 13:1-9 (1 Cor 10:1-13; Ezekiel 33:7-20)

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

Have you ever considered your eyes? The way our bodies are built, our eyes look *away* from ourselves and *to* other people. If you want to look at yourself, you either have to bend your head awkwardly, or use a mirror.

For to look at ourselves is not how God designed us.
Our eyes are directed to others.
That we might see the needs of others, and take care of them.
That we might see the good in others, and praise them.
That we might see the beauty of God’s creation, in all of its diversity and wonder,
and praise our good and gracious Lord.

That’s how its supposed to be, its seems to me.

But in reality, when we look at others, what *do* we see? What do we often focus on,
and dwell on? Their needs, their good . . . or more often than not, is it their sin.
Their shortcomings.
The things about them that bug us.
How they do not meet or live up to *my* expectations.
How they have failed in one way or another.
How I wish they were different.
How they are not as good as . . . well, *me*.

And so it was in the Holy Gospel today. *Hey Jesus, did you hear about those Galileans? Did you hear about those folks the tower fell on? . . .* What did they do to deserve that? Boy, they must have been some kind of sinners!

But this kind of evaluation Jesus is not interested in.
And with it the *pride* in looking down on others,
and the *arrogance* to think that we can know why things like this happen.
Why one person gets cancer and another doesn't.
Why a marriage breaks up.
Why families struggle and children go astray.
Why . . .

But Jesus doesn't answer the "whys." **Instead, He hauls out His mirror.** That our eyes that see the sin in others might see the sin in ourselves. And so twice (repeating it for emphasis) Jesus tells them: "*No, not them; what about you? Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*"

And stunned silence ensued, no doubt.
For that's what the mirror of the Law does,
when we see the sin of our bodies and the sin of our souls.

It shuts us up. (Rom 3:19)

For we have no defense, no justification, no argument that's going to make a lick of difference. The sin I see in others should remind me of the sin that lives in me.

For example: Scooter Libby was convicted this week of perjury. *Am I any better?*
When was the last time I lied, or didn't quite tell the whole truth? To protect myself, or to get away with something, or to save face?

We hear of murders on the news everyday. *Am I any better?* When was the last time I hated someone, or wished them dead? Or hurt them with my words? Or passed them by when I could have helped?

Marriages and families are falling apart all around us. *Am I any better?* Do I love and cherish my spouse as I should? Have I been the father or mother, or son or daughter I should? Am I so great?

My neighbor doesn't go to church. *Am I any better?* When I'm here physically but not always mentally? When I say I'll pray for someone and then don't? When I hear God's Word, but it makes little difference in my life?

Do you think these folks are worse sinners than you?

Where is the fruit we are supposed to produce?

Are you producing big, plump, juicy figs . . .

or scrawny, little, dried out figs . . .

or no figs at all?

Take a look in the mirror, of God's holy Law, and see the filthy, black, slimy, smelly cesspool of sin that lives not just in others – but that lives in you and me.

And realize: how foolish my pride. How stupid my arrogance.

Did you hear St. Paul's warning? "Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

For how blessed was Israel, yet also how foolish!

Receiving so many good things from God, yet what happened to them?

These are examples for us, Paul says.

Look at them and learn.

Look at them and know we are no different.

*Look at them, **and repent.***

Yes, that's the answer.

It is not to try harder next time.

It is not to summon your inner strength and resolve.

For you've done that already, haven't you? And it didn't work.

For although as Paul said, God provides the way out of temptations, and promises never to give you more than your ability –

the devil also knows how to play you, and weaken you, and seduce you.

And so when we fall the fault is not God's, but ours.

*And so the fruit that *should* have been there isn't. And we deserve to be cut down.*

*And yet, you are not. For the One who has come to take care of the vineyard has interceded for you. So He says: *No, not yet! There will be a time for chopping – but not yet. Let me feed, let me water, let me fertilize. They don't deserve it. But I love these trees. Let me pour my sweat and blood into them. Let me die for them.* And He did. On the cross.*

And so His death means life for you.

Life from the dead.

Lifeless, fruitless, useless trees now given the “miracle grow” of God’s Word, and
water, and body and blood.

That forgiven with His forgiveness,
and watered with his water,

and fed with His own flesh and blood, you be as He is.

Not because *you* did it, but because *He* did it.

And He now lives in you.

To produce the fruit of compassion,
the fruit of good works,
the fruits of faith.

The fruits that only *repentant* trees (repentant sinners!) *can* bear.

For only in repentance do we see ourselves rightly, laying aside our pride and
arrogance, and see our need.

Only in repentance do we give up on our own strength and rely on His strength.

Only in repentance do we fall at the foot of the cross at the altar and the font to
receive the nourishment we need.

Only chopped down now in repentance are we raised to a new life in the vinedresser
who allowed Himself to be chopped down on the cross for us.

For as He was raised, so too are we raised.

Yes, are raised – present tense! *Not* will be – future tense.

You are a new tree, raised to a new life, even now!

That you may produce fruit now, as your Saviour lives in you.

For after looking the mirror and seeing who you really are, you look at others in a
whole new light.

Not as worse than you, or better than you, but just like you.

For repentance brings compassion, and eyes to see as eyes should see.

Eyes focused on Christ, and so focused on our neighbor in need.

To help and care,

to forgive and praise,

and to pray.

Which is how (it seems to me) its supposed to be.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.