

The Randomness of Life

Luke 13:1-9

The Third Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The creation is broken. We broke it. When we ate of the tree about which God told us not to eat, He pronounced a curse on the creation. He said that because of us the ground was cursed. He said that it would produce thorns and thistles for us. He said that we were cursed to find our living from the ground and we were cursed to toil upon the ground. And then He cursed us with death. He told us that we would return to the ground from which we came.

The creation is therefore subjected to decay. All of the creation is gradually falling apart. We are falling apart with it. Scientists call it entropy. It is the second law of thermodynamics. Any system left to itself will naturally go from a state of order to a state of disorder. If you clean your house and leave it for a year, when you come back it will have gone into a state of disorder to one degree or another all by itself. No it is not just you, but because you have brought curse upon the creation in this fashion it is just you.

God is a God of order. He is not a God of disorder. When God curses the creation He is cursing something that he created with order. And even though the creation is cursed we can still see some of the order remaining in it. The planets still move in their orbits. Our bodies still function as a whole. Even when our bodies return to the dust, when we die, there is still some part of our body that is still functioning.

Since God is a God of order when He curses the creation, He curses it with disorder. Not even the curse itself is applied in an orderly fashion. If the curse of decay and death were applied to us in an orderly fashion, then we would all age at the same rate and we would all die at the same age. Since the creation is cursed with disorder we all age at different rates. We all die at different times. There are different things that kill us.

One person dies at age 18. Another person dies at age 95. One person dies of cancer way before their time as we say. Another person lives to be a hundred and dies of old age. One person dies in a random traffic accident that was not their fault. Another person dies when their home is struck by a hurricane. We human beings were created by God to look for order, but God has cursed the world with disorder. Even the curse itself is meted out in a disorderly fashion. The disorder of the randomness of death is part of the curse itself. We brought it upon ourselves when we ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This situation in the creation pushes us in one of two directions, both of which are false.

Since God is a God of order and the creation applies suffering and death in a disorderly fashion many human beings have come to the conclusion that God is not behind our suffering and death. Some human beings go all of the way and say that there is no God at all. They say that the universe formed out of a Big Bang and that we evolved eons later. They say that it is all a random product of cosmic forces working in and on the universe in which we live. They therefore apply natural explanations to the phenomena that we encounter. They have natural explanations for the weather that afflicts us. They have natural explanations for the diseases that kill us. They have natural explanations for the forces that take our life from us and they say that it is all random. There is no God reigning over or controlling any of it.

Other human beings do not go to such extremes, but they wind up in the same place. Some human beings will say that there is a God. They will say that He made the universe. But they will say that like a good clock maker God made the universe and then set it on His shelf and let it go on its merry way

according to the rules that He had laid down for it. He does not interfere with it. Therefore while God may have made the universe according to these people He does not interfere with it. Therefore the universe is going on its merry way doing whatever it is that the universe does according to the rules that God has laid down for it. In this way of thinking God may be almighty, but His almighty power does not do anyone any good. He does not use it to intervene in the universe to help anyone. We are subject to random death even though He is there.

Still others have proposed that God is not almighty and is therefore incapable of preventing some of our deaths and so on.

What all of these proposals have as their ultimate falsehood is that God is not aback of the suffering that we endure. That would seem to let God off of the hook. They quote Bible passages like the one where Elijah is on the top of Mount Carmel and the Lord is not in the fire, the wind, or the earthquake, which passage has nothing at all to do with what we are discussing here. Such proposals leave you hopeless. You certainly cannot control the curse of the death that looms over you and if God is not there or cannot control it either, then what hope do you have?

That means that God is behind everything.

If we are going to confess that God is the Father Almighty, then we must confess that God is behind everything. There is not one event that has happened that God could not have prevented. There is not one event in which God is not an operative cause. This includes the death that besets us. He is the one who cursed the ground. He is the one who brings about our death. He is the one who subjected us and the creation to decay. Whether we die a still birth or live to be a hundred and ten, when He died, He is the One who put us to death and we deserved it because of our sins.

This drives some people to another extreme. There is another false conclusion to which we may come. The second false conclusion to which many human beings come is that when something bad happens to someone it must have happened to them because they did something worse than the rest of us.

You can see how they work this out. If God is the cause of our death, then when someone dies it is because God is putting them to death for their sins. Such people then falsely conclude that if a certain person dies young or if they die tragically that that means that that person must have done something more wicked than other people to have suffered and died in that tragic fashion.

One example from recent memory stands out. Hurricane Katrina strikes New Orleans. A TV preacher says that the hurricane struck New Orleans because of the sins of that city. While the statement is true enough by not explaining himself his viewers are left to conclude that somehow those people in New Orleans must have been worse sinners than everyone else because they suffered in this way.

It is to this misunderstanding that our Lord addresses Himself when some people come up to Him and start talking to Him about some other people they know whom Pilate put to death. And Pilate didn't just put these people to death. He mixed their blood with their sacrifices. That is to say that Pilate defiled the altar and the sanctuary at the temple by having people put to death in the temple and then sprinkling their blood on the altar along with the animal blood that was supposed to be there. This would have defiled the altar in such way that the priests would have had to have made purification for the altar before regular sacrifice could have resumed upon it. Pilate probably did this to show how much power he had, that he could enter the sanctuary and defile it in defiance of the God who lived there.

An event like that would stand out in your mind. It would stand out in your mind for both religious and political reasons. It would stand out in your mind like Katrina or 9/11 does for us. It raises all of the false conclusions that I have just described including the one that says that those people whose

blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices must have been worse sinners because they suffered in this way. Jesus tells them, "No."

Now let us be clear. Here is what that means. In spite of the fact that God is Almighty, in spite of the fact that He is behind everything that happens in the universe, in spite of the fact that He does have moral standards to which we are responsible, that does not mean that if someone dies in a particularly horrific, tragic, or sudden way that they were somehow worse sinners than anyone else. Death is death and it is tragic no matter to who it comes or when it comes. Those who are spared death for a long time have merely been given more of His grace.

And so our Lord issues His warning. Do you think that those people in New Orleans were worse sinners because they suffered in this way? I tell you no! But unless you repent you too will all perish. Or those who died on 9/11, do you think that they were worse sinners because they died in this way. I tell you no, but unless you repent you too will all perish.

Notice that our Lord covers both natural deaths and murders. The people who were murdered by Pilate were no worse sinners than anyone else. The people who were murdered on 9/11 were no worse sinners than anyone else. The people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them were no worse sinners than anyone else. The people who died in Hurricane Katrina or in any natural disaster or accident were no worse sinners than anyone else. But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Our Lord steers a path between both extremes. He does not say that God is not almighty. He does not say that God's hand was not at work in any of the tragedies that happen. At the same time, He does not say that they were somehow worse sinners than any of the rest of us. You and I are not allowed by our Lord to assert our own righteousness in front of Him simply because we have not suffered some tragedy. We have no right to stand before God and look at the blessings of our life and come to the conclusion that we are blessed because we are more righteous than those around us and that those who suffer worse than we do are worse sinners than the rest of us.

When a tragedy happens to someone, they are getting what their deeds deserve. They are a sinner and they deserve a random death. The creation is cursed in such a way to give to them a random death. That death serves as a warning to all of us that we will die also and whether tragic or not we deserve to die because of our sins. Unless you repent you too will all perish. Tragic deaths call our attention to our mortality. They do not let us forget that death is not a natural part of the creation. Death is not the natural end of life. Tragic death reminds us that all death is a curse. It reveals to us the real nature of death. Tragic deaths put before our eyes the true nature of death that we try to cover up with embalming fluid and cremation boxes. Tragic deaths therefore remind us of what we deserve because we are sinners. They therefore also remind us that each and every blessing that we have is because of the grace of God and only because of the grace of God.

This issue is not why they died in this way. The issue is why haven't you? You certainly deserve it. And when you ask that question suddenly the grace of God is visible to you and you have reason to thank and praise Him.

And so repent! Repent now lest something worse happen to you. Repent now or you too will all perish. You are alive! Treasure your life. God is digging around you and He is putting on His fertilizer. He is looking for fruit next year.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen