

Luke 13:1-5

A couple of news stories in our text are the talk of the town in Jerusalem. The first is that Pilate had his soldiers put some Galileans to death as they were worshiping in the temple. The second is that a tower had fallen crushing eighteen people to death. The city is all astir. People die every day, but these deaths are not typical.

Human nature is quick to form an opinion. It happened back in Job's day. When he lost everything, including all his children, and on top of that suffered brutally with sores that covered his entire body, his three so-called "friends" naturally assumed that Job was guilty of secret sins for which God was punishing him. It happened in Jesus' day. In John 9 we read of a man who was born blind. It was assumed that this man was a great sinner to be punished in this way. It happens in our day. When something goes terribly wrong, aren't we quick to ask ourself: "What did I do to deserve this?"

And sometimes we are correct. If you were to ask an officer what you did to deserve that speeding ticket, he would gladly tell you. In Acts 12 we're told that Herod suffered an awful death, being struck by an angel of God and eaten by worms because he did not give glory to God.

But Jesus in our text makes it clear that we are not to jump to conclusions. Our reaction should not be to sit in judgment with our high opinions, but to repent. "*Do you think,*" He says, "*that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the others because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" "*Or those eighteen,*" He goes on to say, "*on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them; do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*"

You and I are flooded on a daily basis by news stories which can easily cause us to sit in judgment. "He got what he deserved." "She didn't deserve that." "They got off easy." Something we do constantly is to form opinions. If a stranger were to come in and sit down with us, looking and smelling like he had been living in a cardboard box on the street, everyone of us would quickly have an opinion about him.

But seriously, one of the most dangerous things in life is to form an opinion...unless it is formed by the Word of God. Humans never get it right. No one ever stumbles upon the truth. Opinions are the enemy of the truth.

"Well, in my opinion, those Galileans who were killed by Pilate were worse sinners." An easy opinion to form. Pilate is the ruler there. If he had his soldiers put some to death, they must have done something to deserve it. "In my opinion, those eighteen were worse sinners. Towers don't just suddenly fall. God surely caused that tower to fall on them because they had done something awful to deserve it. After all, bad things simply don't happen to good people."

Everyone who ends up perishing in hell will do so because they stuck to their opinions. When the truth of God's Word was matched up against their own opinions, their high opinions won out in the end.

And here's what should sober us up: the less we are in the Word; reading it, studying it, meditating upon it, the more our opinions take over. But when God's Word is our constant companion, the less value we put on our opinions.

So what if you were to see a man legally convicted and sentenced to die; and you see that man put to death? Would you opine, "Well, he got what he deserved." That happened in Jerusalem. Jesus was convicted and sentenced. He was hung up on a cross, a bloody mess. All the passersby formed the opinion that this man got what was coming to him.

What is your opinion? Were it not for Holy Scripture, we would think the same thing. We would sit in judgment over Jesus. We must repent of our vile, judgmental opinions or we "*will all likewise perish.*"

Holy Scripture alone speaks the truth. Jesus got what you and I deserve. We are the worst offenders; Jesus is the holy, innocent one. It was my sin that put Jesus on the cross. Scripture speaks these truths to us.

Everyone has an opinion of Jesus. Opinions do not create faith. Only the Holy Gospel does that. And this Gospel is for you. Jesus did not point His finger at you from the cross and say, "You deserve this, not Me!" Rather He said, "*Father, forgive them...* Do not hold their sins against them. Give Me the punishment they deserve. Forgive them."

And He does. Forget your opinions. The truth is that God forgives you of every sin. The truth is that your baptism gives you a place in heaven with Jesus. The truth is that Jesus' true body and blood are for you in the Sacrament as a sign and testament that He died and rose again for you.

The only opinion that matters is God's. He is not swayed by the opinions of others. He is not judgmental of you. He was willing to perish...to endure hell for you on the cross. That's how much He loves you.

Were you to ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" The answer is, "Nothing." Jesus did it all for you. No one deserves heaven. We all deserve to be punished forever. But Jesus is the difference in your life. Pilate sentenced Him to death. The tower of God's wrath fell upon Him. Because of Jesus, God gives you what you do not deserve: every good gift now, and a place in heaven forever. All opinions aside, this is the absolute truth. Amen!