

**What time is it?**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill**  
**Sunday March 20, 2022**

**Luke 13:1-9**

What time is it?

It is 11:00, it is the beginning of spring, it's the season of Lent, it's the middle of my life, it's the beginning of my life, it is the end of my life. I am hearing again, it is the end of times, it is the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end. How do we mark or understand this time? This is part of the questions behind our passage.

It begins with people coming to Jesus to tell him about another one of Herod's atrocities.

Like today, people want to know "why" things happen. Putin invading Ukraine, someone gets cancer, there is a car accident and someone is killed – why – why them? Is it God's punishment? Is that person worse than others? Do people get what they deserve? If I am sick or poor, or if I am healthy and rich, am I getting what I deserve?

For most of us, most days, we see it doesn't work that way. Good people – great people get bombed, or get cancer, nasty, mean-spirited people get bombed or get cancer. We know in our heads that the good don't die young, nor are they guaranteed a good long life. Jesus brings up an accident- a tower fell on a group of people – why, why them?

Jesus doesn't engage that question – it doesn't have an answer (at least not one on this side of eternity). But Jesus urgently tells the crowd that they are missing the point. They are going to die. Everyone is going to die. C.S. Lewis said war does not increase the number of people who die (though it may hasten their end).

There is urgency around repenting. Death can come suddenly, unexpectedly, either because of tyrants like Herod or Putin, or just because of unfortunate circumstances.

Jesus has turned his face towards Jerusalem, this is the time of their visitation, it is important that they listen to Jesus and his teaching, the time is short.

In just a couple of verses earlier Jesus had called the people to consider the times:

*<sup>54</sup>He also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. <sup>55</sup>And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. <sup>56</sup>You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)*

Later in Luke, in chapter 19 Jesus again warns the people saying;  
*They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'* (Luke 19:44)

And in just a few verses from our passage Jesus says to them:  
*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

And so “perishing” in this passage isn’t just about one person’s death or going to hell, it is about Jerusalem being destroyed, and God’s people being judged. Rejecting Jesus, rejecting his message, turning away from him, had implications for God’s people. “Repent – or you will also perish.”

Jesus’ message is the prophet’s word, God had sent Jesus into the world that the world might be saved through him. Rejecting the message, rejecting the messenger, leads to destruction, the people will perish.

But I think there is more to this passage –  
“Repent” – turn –

And Jesus mentions a fig tree.

Do you remember the message of the fiery prophet, John the Baptist, as Luke began his story.

*<sup>7</sup>John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'*

Repent, bear fruits worthy of repentance.

The fruits of the Spirit are peace, love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, generosity, and self-control.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

This is the time, this is the day, this is the moment to hear God's voice and respond.

Then Jesus told them a parable;

*A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, "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?"*

But that is not the last word of the parable – the gardener – Jesus continues; *Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.*

What is this time? The time when the gardener is caring for the barren tree, tending it, giving it all it needs to bear fruit, including one more year.

But Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Let's give this one more year.

Hear the gracious words of God from Isaiah:

*"Come, all you who are thirsty.*

*Come and drink the water I offer to you.*

**Jesus said whoever comes to him will never be thirsty.**

*You who do not have any money, come.*

*Buy and eat the grain I give you.*

*Come and buy wine and milk.*

*You will not have to pay anything for it.*

**Jesus is the bread of life.**

*Why spend money on what is not food?*

*Why work for what does not satisfy you?*

**What are you striving and longing for?**

*Listen carefully to me.*

**Turn and follow Jesus.**

*Then you will eat what is good.*

*You will enjoy the richest food there is.*

*Listen and come to me.*

*Pay attention to me.*

*Then you will live."*

This is the time that we can repent – this is the time that Jesus gives us all that we need to lead lives of abundance.

This is the time that the church can bear fruit and make a difference in this world.

What time is it?

The gardener, Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem, towards the cross, so that we might know life in his death, and hope for our world.

Thanks be to God!

God of grace, thank you for this time; time to repent, time to grow, time to be fed as your people, and time to bear fruit for you in this world. We give ourselves to you. Amen