

## **Rethinking Our Lives**

**Text: Luke 13:1-5**

**A Message by James R. Newby**

**In this Scripture reading from Luke, Jesus is speaking to a people who seem to believe that it is God's job to punish evil and reward good, to make sure that the cosmic cause and effect checkbook balances. Bad things should happen to bad people, and good things should happen to good people. Those at the front of the line should go first, and those at the back of the line should go last. They think the world should be a spiritual meritocracy where life accurately metes out the A's and the F's, the carrots and the sticks.**

**Many in our world think that God's job is to make sure this life is fair. God is supposed to make sure that the righteous prosper, and that the evil doers are the ones who suffer. So often people talk a good sophisticated theology of God's love and mercy, but, in practice, many believe in the straightforward equation of the book of *Deuteronomy*: where sin=curses and obedience=blessings. That is**

**why whenever we do something wrong, somewhere inside of us we're waiting for the other shoe to drop...for the curse to catch up to us.**

**Sometimes we don't believe in God so much as we believe in Karma. We think that God is the great impartial moral referee who is just there to enforce the rules, call the fouls and keep score. Well, that is not the God I have known. Instead, we have a God, who in this world at least, makes the sun rise on the evil and the good, who sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. We have a God who pays the workers who arrive at the end of the day the same wages as those who have worked all day long—We have a Jesus of Scripture, who forgives murderers and hangs out with adulterers, while reproofing Pharisees and disciplining saints. We have a God who in mystery withholds for a time the just judgment that we seek, who seems willing to let the weeds and the wheat grow together, and whose extreme patience and restraint and mercy sometimes borders on the negligent.**

**It is hard to understand a God like this. And when it comes to pain and suffering, the well is deep and it feels like we have no bucket. In the face of suffering, our net of meaning is way too small.**

**And yet this doesn't stop us from taking our little buckets and our little nets and trying to make some meaning of it all. As human beings we are desperate for answers. Humans naturally fear living in a mystery that is incomprehensible. We feel the need to tell a coherent story about our suffering...to glean meaning from the pain we feel and the suffering through which we are going. And so those murdered Galileans must be worse sinners than all other Galileans...that must be why this happened. And those people crushed beneath the tower of Siloam must have had it coming to them. And so we think that the murders and tower and the earthquake or the accident or the illness must all have to do with just desserts, or with God, because it is somehow easier for us to believe in an angry God or an indifferent God than it is to accept a God of love whose ways are not our ways, and whose thoughts are**

**not our thoughts, whose love is not our love, and whose justice, at least in this world, is not our justice.**

**The modern world can delude us into thinking that we really do have life under control. Diseases can be cured. Sensible precautions and wise laws can safeguard against tragedy. We are intelligent people. We can handle things!**

**But then come these moments where we catch a glimpse that maybe our lives are far more fragile than we believed. Moments of vulnerability that overcome us after a loved one dies, or towers have fallen, or the earth has shaken, or when we get sick. Moments where we face the stark and even terrifying reality that, despite our well-manicured lawns, our carefully laid out streets, our five year plans, and our advanced technology, that we are not as in control as we think.**

**“Unless you repent,” says Jesus, “you will all perish just as unsuspectingly as they did.” I don't believe that Jesus is trying to scare us...he is just telling us the truth. And we don't want to hear**

**that. Here we are going about the business of our lives, believing we are on a solid foundation, and Jesus comes along and tells us that we are sitting on a shifting fault line! We don't want to hear that, but Jesus tells us anyway...*He tells us that one of the powerful side-effects of living in this world is that there will be tragedy.* And within the various tragedies of our lives, a holy space will open in us, and we will feel and know the fragility of our lives.**

**My latest book is about helping religious leaders through some of their most difficult life passages...divorce, retirement, mid-life, the death of a spouse or children, and so forth. It is about finding new life and spiritual growth when cracks appear in the foundations of our lives, and life takes a dramatic turn. And it is not just religious leaders who will have these issues, it is all of us.**

**And Friends, when we feel that kind of vulnerability, it is a moment of truth. These places of vulnerability will move us to re-think our lives. When Jesus says, "repent" in this passage from Luke, he does not mean that you bow down in fear before an angry**

**God. No, a better translation for the word, “repent” is to “rethink” your life...to rethink reality. In that open, vulnerable and fragile space we are given the opportunity to rethink where our ultimate security lies, and allow it to change how we think about the world we fit into, about what life is all about, and about the God of Love that we worship.**