

Breaking Open the Word

Lent 3C

23rd March, 2025



**It either faces it, or it will be
nurtured by it:**

Life as we know it!

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary

Lent 3C

Isaiah 55.1-9

Psalms 63.1-9

1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Luke 13.1-9

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

*We beseech thee, Almighty God,
look upon the hearty desires
of thy humble servants
and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty
to be our defence against all our enemies:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

INTRODUCTION

This short article reflects the pervasive suffering in today's world, drawing on Rabbi Howard Kushner's insightful exploration of grief from his personal loss.

The article highlights the ongoing challenges society faces, such as wars, natural disasters, and the lingering effects of the pandemic.

The writing emphasises the common human tendency to question the reasons behind suffering, especially in light of Jesus' teachings, which challenge the notion of a vengeful God.

Instead, there is a call for self-examination, suggesting that responsibility lies within ourselves rather than in the actions of others or divine punishment.

Readers are encouraged followers to respond to suffering with love and compassion rather than blame.

The article underscores the importance of personal repentance and nurturing growth, even in challenging circumstances, as illustrated by the Parable of the Fig Tree.

Embodying God's grace and supporting one another through adversity reminds the congregation that true repentance transforms struggles into opportunities for hope and renewed life.

In closing, the article urges everyone to remain hopeful for a future where good fruits come from their faithfulness in God's will.

Prayer Prompts

Note any prayer requests you may have.

- Ask God to help us recognise our responsibility in times of suffering.
- Pray for the strength to embody God's presence for those who need it.
- Ask for guidance on how to live a life aligned with divine will in the coming week.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

May the words of my lips
and the meditation of our
hearts be acceptable in
your sight, O Lord, our
strength and Redeemer.
Amen.

In 1981, Rabbi Howard
Kushner penned a book
that would resonate with
many: *When Bad Things
Happen to Good People*.
Through his heart-
wrenching experience of
watching his 14-year-old
son succumb to an
incurable illness, he
explored the depths of
suffering. Today, we see
similar struggles in our
world, from the war in
Ukraine to the devastation
of floods in New South
Wales and Queensland.

We are still grappling with
the ongoing effects of
Covid, and now the
seasonal flu has returned.
Rising prices significantly
impact us, particularly at
the petrol pump. The

government seeks solutions
as we approach a critical
election period, leaving us
uncertain about the future.

In today's Gospel, Jesus
confronts a tragic event in
which Galileans were killed
whilst worshipping. This
raises an uncomfortable
question: whose sin led to
this suffering? Paul
addresses similar themes in
his letters, reflecting on
Israel's distance from God
and the consequences of
that separation. However,
this is not the vengeful God
that Jesus embodies.

If we cling to the belief in a
loving God, we must
question why such
misfortunes occur in a post-
resurrection world. Sin is
ever-present, and it's easy
to cast blame on others,
including God. However,
Jesus urges us to
recognise our responsibility.

As Teresa of Ávila wisely

observed, we are the hands
and eyes of God in this
world.

Jesus further encourages
us to reflect on whose sin
was greater among those
who perished when the
tower fell or those at the
Pool of Siloam. Each of
these individuals had
undergone a purification
process, acknowledging
their sins. Pilate's actions,
which led to the deaths,
serve as a poignant
reminder that blame can
often be misplaced.

Rather than blaming others,
we should concentrate on
how we respond to such
tragedies. We are called to
love and serve the Lord,
ensuring our lives align with
His will. Salvation is not
merely a transaction; it
involves a heartfelt turning
to God, who walks with us
on our journey.

While we can encourage
others to repent, the
journey of repentance
remains deeply personal. If
we shun those we view as
offenders, are we truly

fulfilling God's will? Jesus
welcomed sinners, teaching
us the significance of
extending that same grace.

Bishop David Walker
stated, "To repent
transforms our death into a
bridge to a life of glory."
The parable of the fig tree
encourages us to nurture
growth, even if it takes time
to bear fruit. In our work
with children, we plant
seeds that may take years
to flourish.

In times of adversity, let's
avoid the temptation to
assign blame. Instead, let
us embody God's presence
for those who need it,
providing compassion and
support.

Ultimately, how we respond
is essential. As Bishop
Walker reminds us, true
repentance leads to eternal
life in Jesus.

Although it might take time
for good fruits to manifest,
let's support one another
and look forward to the day
when all good things come
to light.

Discussion Questions

In the article, there is a discussion of the tragic event where Galileans were killed while worshipping.

- Why do you think people often try to find someone to blame, especially when faced with a tragedy?

The article discusses how people question whose sin caused the suffering when tragedy strikes, reflecting on our tendency to blame others.

- Can you think of a situation in your life where you or someone else tried to assign blame during a difficult time?
- How might things have changed if the focus was on support and understanding instead?

The article mentions that Jesus urges us to take responsibility for our actions rather than blaming others.

- What do you think is meant by recognising our responsibility in challenging situations?
- The article emphasises that Jesus calls us to reflect on our actions and not just point fingers at others.
- How can recognising your role in a situation help you grow as a person and strengthen your relationships with others?

The article suggests that repentance is a personal journey.

- What does repentance mean to you, and why is it essential to our lives?
- The article highlights that while we can

encourage others to change, the journey of turning back to God is deeply personal.

- Can you share when you felt the need to repent or make amends for something?
- How did that experience change you or your relationships?

The article discusses planting seeds with children that may take years to flourish.

- How does this relate to giving others time and support to grow?

The article uses the Parable of the Fig Tree to encourage nurturing growth in ourselves and others over time.

- Reflect on someone you know who is going through a tough time.
- How can you support them as they grow, even if progress seems slow?

Bishop Walker said that true repentance transforms our death into a bridge to a life of glory.

- What does this mean for how we view suffering and redemption?

The article includes this quote to express that our struggles can lead to more profound spiritual growth and eventual joy through repentance.

- How can viewing suffering as a part of our growth help you cope with your challenges?
- Can you think of a way to turn a problematic situation into a lesson?

Discussion Starters

You could discuss these topics to help further the conversation about what they may have learned on Sunday.

- What do you think it means to be responsible for our actions?
 - This relates to Jesus urging us to look at our own lives instead of blaming others, as discussed in the article.
- Why do you think bad things happen to good people?
 - This question stems from the exploration of suffering highlighted in the article.
- How can we show grace to others who have made mistakes?
 - This idea comes from the example of Jesus welcoming sinners and teaching us about grace.
- What does Bishop David Walker mean when he says, "To repent transforms our death into a bridge to a life of glory"?
 - This quote from Bishop Walker emphasises the power of repentance discussed in the sermon.
- How can we support each other in times of difficulty?
 - This is based on the call to embody God's presence and love during challenging times, as mentioned in the sermon.



Historical Context

Time Period: The Gospel of Luke is generally believed to have been written between A.D. 70 and A.D. 90, with a consensus leaning towards A.D. 80-85 (Source: Brown, R. E. "An Introduction to the New Testament"). This period follows the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70, a significant event that shaped Jewish identity and early Christian thought.

Political Situation: During this time, Judea was under Roman rule, governed explicitly by the Roman Empire. The political landscape was marked by tensions between the Jewish population and Roman authorities, which influenced social dynamics and religious practices. The presence of Roman soldiers and the imposition of taxes often led to resentment among the Jews, creating a backdrop of unrest and longing for a Messiah who would liberate them.

Key Figures: In the context of Luke 13:1-5, significant figures include Jesus, who is addressing the crowd, and Pilate, the Roman governor mentioned in the passage. Additionally, the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders play a role in the broader narrative, representing the religious authority of the time. Understanding their perspectives helps to illuminate the challenges Jesus faced in conveying his message.

Other Relevant Historical Context: The passage reflects a period of heightened awareness of suffering and tragedy, as illustrated by the reference to the Galileans whose blood was mixed with sacrifices. This incident likely alludes to a historical event in which Pilate ordered the execution of Galilean worshippers, emphasising the brutality of Roman rule and the precariousness of life for the Jewish people. Such occurrences would have shaped the theological reflections of the time, particularly with regard to sin and suffering.

Cultural Context

Social Customs: Family and community structures heavily influenced daily life in first-century Judea. Men typically held positions of authority, while women were often relegated to domestic roles. The family unit was central to Jewish identity, with strong emphasis on lineage and heritage. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for interpreting Jesus' teachings, as they often challenged societal norms.

Religious Practices: The Jewish people were deeply religious, observing numerous festivals and rituals. The Temple in Jerusalem served as the focal point of worship, where sacrifices were made, and festivals such as Passover and Yom Kippur were celebrated. The reference to sacrifices in Luke 13:1-5 ties into these practices, as Jesus discusses the relationship between sin, suffering, and divine judgement, which were central themes in Jewish theology.

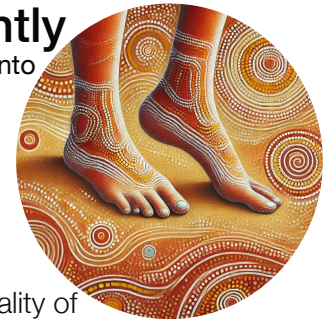
Legal Systems: The legal framework of the time was based in the Torah, which governed both religious and civil matters. The Pharisees, who were influential in interpreting the law, often stressed strict adherence to these laws. This context is crucial for understanding Jesus' challenge to the prevailing interpretations of sin and suffering, as He reframes the discussion around repentance rather than mere legalistic observance.

Other Relevant Cultural Context: The concept of suffering and its relation to sin was a common belief in Jewish thought. Many believed that suffering was a direct consequence of personal or communal sin. Jesus' response in this passage counters this notion, emphasising the need for repentance and a deeper understanding of God's mercy. This cultural backdrop informs how His message would have been received by his audience, who were grappling with their own experiences of suffering and injustice.

Walking the sacred earth gently

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend.

It will explore the themes of protection, love, and the challenges that arise as we strive to follow Jesus's teachings.



Day 1

Luke 13:1-5

In today's scripture, Jesus addresses the harsh reality of suffering that befell certain Galileans while they worshipped. This prompts us to reflect on the deeper questions of why bad things happen to good people. Often, we find ourselves drawn to assign blame either to God or to those who suffer. Yet, we must remember that suffering is not a reflection of one's sinfulness but rather an intrinsic part of our earthly journey. Jesus challenges us to look inward, recognising our responsibilities in a world fraught with injustice and pain.

You are invited to consider how you respond to suffering, both in your own life and in the lives of others. In a post-resurrection world, we are called to be compassionate, offering love and support instead of judgment. As we reflect on our responses to tragedy, may we remember that we are God's hands and eyes, entrusted with the task of loving and serving those around us.

- What are some ways I have assigned blame in my own life, and how can I shift that perspective?
- How can I be more compassionate towards those who are suffering?
- In what ways is God calling me to take responsibility for my part in the suffering of others?
- Pray for insight into your personal journey of suffering. Ask God to help you embody his love to others who are facing challenges.

Day 2

Romans 3:23-26

As we delve deeper into the theme of repentance, Paul reminds us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Understanding this universal truth helps to dismantle the tendency to view suffering solely through the lens of individual fault. Our collective distance from God and the consequences of sin are central to the human experience. Jesus invites us to embrace the grace offered through Him rather than succumb to despair. In repentance, we transform our recognition of failure into an opportunity for growth. Each act of turning back to God signifies a deeper alignment with His will. Let's take this moment to reflect on how we can encourage both ourselves and those around us to embrace this journey of repentance, recognising it as a profound pathway to restoration and connection with

God's love.

- How have I experienced grace in my life despite my shortcomings?
- What does true repentance look like in my relationship with God?
- How can I support others on their journey of repentance?
- Pray for the humility to acknowledge your own sins.
- Ask God to show you how to extend grace to others.

Day 3 John 8:1-11

The story of the woman caught in adultery serves as a powerful reminder of Jesus' radical grace in the face of judgment. This scripture challenges us to reconsider how we respond to those we view as offenders. Jesus, in His wisdom, positions Himself as the one who offers forgiveness rather than condemnation. In our society, it's all too easy to shun others, failing to realise how we too are in need of grace.

As we reflect on this message, let's ask ourselves how we can cultivate a spirit of welcome and grace within our communities. This means reaching out to those who are struggling rather than pushing them away. The call to embody God's grace is not just for our own benefit; it enriches the lives of those around us and draws us closer to God's heart.

- How have I responded to individuals in my life whom I consider to be 'sinners'?
- What steps can I take to extend grace to those I struggle to accept?
- In what ways does receiving God's grace impact my interactions with others?
- Pray for the ability to see others through God's eyes.
- Ask for help in overcoming judgmental attitudes in your own heart.

Day 4 Luke 13:6-9

The parable of the fig tree reminds us of the importance of nurturing growth and fostering patience in our spiritual journeys. Just as the gardener tended to the fig tree, we too must dedicate ourselves to nurturing and supporting those around us — especially children and those in need of guidance. This nurturing process may take time, and it challenges us to be patient as we trust in God's timing for growth and fruitfulness.

As we consider how to cultivate the growth of faith in others, let us also reflect on our own spiritual vitality. Are we allowing God to prune and cultivate our hearts? Our journey with God requires intentional

action, and we must be willing to devote ourselves to nurturing our relationship with Him and with those around us.

- What areas of my life need more nurturing and intentional growth?
- How can I invest time and energy into the spiritual growth of others?
- What signs of growth have I seen in my own life recently?
- Pray for patience as you wait on God's timing.
- Ask for guidance on how to actively support others in their faith journeys.

Day 5 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

As we conclude this devotional journey, we embrace the transformative nature of repentance and the new life offered in Jesus. We are reminded that repentance leads to a life of glory, as noted by Bishop Walker. The apostle Paul emphasises that in Christ, we are a new creation, called to spread this message of reconciliation and hope. This new beginning allows us to view ourselves and others through the lens of grace.

Let us reflect on how we can support one another in this journey. While the fruits of our repentance may take time to manifest, our community can serve as a nurturing environment for growth and healing. As we close this series, let's commit to walking alongside each other, encouraging love, support, and the hope that leads to eternal life in Jesus.

- How can I embrace the new life that comes from my relationship with Christ?
- In what ways can I encourage others to pursue their own spiritual growth?
- What memories of God's faithfulness can I celebrate and share with my community?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of your identity in Christ.
- Ask God to open doors for you to support someone else on their journey.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)
 The Gospel of Matthew
 The Gospel of John

Tannehill, Robert C, **Narrative Unity Luke Acts Vol: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke.**, Augsburg Fortress Publishers 199

N.T. Wright

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

Bible Hub etc



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