



23rd March 2025

Luke 13 v 1-9

As Western Christians in a modern era we can sometimes fail to put the gospel writings into the context of their time. The result is we downplay certain aspects of passages or even misunderstand the meaning of Jesus' words. These two short passages can seem challenging to the modern ear, but as with all scripture there are useful lessons to learn.

The Lord's disciples were quizzing him about recent tragic events – a bloodthirsty massacre of some locals by a ruler and a seemingly unexpected accident which killed 18 people. We don't have any surviving records of these events, so know no further details apart from this passing mention, but clearly those speaking knew exactly the human tragedy being referred to. Those in conversation with Jesus were questioning him; in today's society no doubt the conversation would have been 'why did a loving God allow these sufferings?' In the culture of the time however, different questions would be asked. Having human blood mixed with animal sacrifice would be seen as a complete desecration both of the individual and the temple itself. The Jews often saw suffering to be a direct consequence of sin; not just the individuals' sin, but also of parents, or even previous family generations. You may recall the healing of the man born blind in John's gospel and the questioning of those present about who was to blame. Jesus' response was one of challenge to the religious rulers and compassion explaining that this man's suffering was not as a result of sin, but in order *'that the work of God may be seen in his life.'*

Thankfully very few of us today would view suffering as a punishment for wrong-doing, but often as a society we are quick to point fingers and find someone to blame when a tragedy occurs. No doubt lessons need to be learnt about industrial or transport safety following an incident and reflection is wise. Nevertheless perhaps we still have the mindset of those first century individuals but in a much more subtle way. We are quick to blame the victim of an assault for walking home alone late at night; the refugees who risk their children's lives in small boats or the injured individual who got into a car when they knew the driver had been drinking ... Life is not without risk and sometimes people suffer considerably for their mistakes. As Christians we are called to show Christ's compassion in a sensitive way by mourning with those who mourn and rejoicing with those who rejoice.

The second passage asks the question 'are we blossoming where God has planted us?' A tree needs watering, feeding and good soil in order to flourish as well as the experience of pruning. As we journey through lent are we making the most of the nourishment the Holy Spirit provides? Are we taking the opportunity to delve deeper into the bible, even those challenging parts; are we disciplined in our prayer time or in sharing God's love with others as he prompts us to respond to suffering or injustice? Much like the blind man God often puts us in particular circumstances for his purposes, to increase the spiritual harvest he desires in our own lives and those around us. This does **not** mean however that God has a giant 'smite button' ready to press gleefully when he wants to teach us a lesson! He is with us throughout painful times, understanding our suffering having himself suffered, being *'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'*. (Isaiah 53v3). God's heart is for everyone to understand and respond to his message of loving salvation and we have a crucial role to play in this. As someone once said *'you are the only Jesus some people will ever see'*. How we respond to our own suffering and the suffering of others is important.

God expects us as to behave differently from the culture around us and respond to his love by showing that love to others. After all he tells us we have 'freely received' and so should freely give. The warnings of Jesus in this passage have to do with attitude of heart; we should look to our own spiritual walk rather than judging others. He rightly tells us 'do not judge' and this includes trying our own subtle methods of judgement when we are feeling superior (Luke 6v37).