

Dear Friends in Christ,

What is it about disasters that make people so reluctant to prepare for them? Is that they are rare and we think, “It won’t happen.” Or is that storms come and many end up being not as bad as predicted. In the mid-1960s the island of Puerto Rico prepared for several violent hurricanes, but all we got was a little wind and steady rain. We didn’t know it, but we were fortunate.

In the city of Sodom in the days of Father Abraham, two men, were told that a disaster of epic proportions was coming. These two men, the sons-in-law of Lot, the nephew of Abraham declined to leave town. Even when the two, angel messengers, told Lot that he and his family needed to leave immediately, they dragged their feet. The angels grabbed them by the hand and pulled them out of town. (Genesis 19)

What is it about disasters that make people reluctant to prepare for them? I guess, we Christians, would say that sinful human nature doesn’t want to believe that God would send disaster, disaster on us.

It is important that we pay attention when God sends out an urgent call. Jesus is talking in Luke 20 during Holy Week. It is one of the last times he addresses his enemies outside of a courtroom. He has an urgent message. It isn’t just for them. There is much we can learn from his urgent call. So I say today to you...**Pay Attention to the Urgent Call.**

1. A call to recognize persistent love

When God gives us an urgent message, it is more than just a warning. One of the things that he communicates is his love, his persistent love. Jesus wanted his enemies and us to see his persistent love.

A. What is God’s persistent love? Jesus brings it into sharp focus in his parable.

1. Many of the Israelites had worked in a vineyard or were familiar with one. It was common practice for a rich man to build a vineyard and then rent it out to farmers. It was a money maker for all.

2. In this story the tenant farmers refuse to pay the rent that was due. They beat the rich man’s servants, treating each one worse than the last. It was an act of sheer grace that the owner kept sending servants. Finally he did the unthinkable, he sent his son. They killed him.

3. God, the Father, is the rich vineyard owner. The people of Israel are the vineyard. Psalm 80 and Jeremiah 2 tell us this. The farmers are the religious leaders of Israel and the servants are the prophets and John the Baptist. The son is Jesus himself. According to St. Luke, the leaders understood what Jesus was picturing. He is foretelling that they will reject him and kill him.

No human landowner would have put up with that kind of rebellion. Jesus' message is clear, God for a time shows a gracious and persistent love towards rebellious sinners. He continues to send his servants today.

B. That gracious love has a time limit. Jesus asks the crowd what the owner of the vineyard will do. He answers his own question. **“He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”** (16b) He is clearly stating that after God's gracious love for sinners there comes a day of judgement. Those who do not receive God's persistent love in faith will be punished.

2. A call to true repentance

The crowd reacts to Jesus' story. But they don't react the way he wants them to. So he points them in the right direction. He issues a call to true repentance.

A. There was a need for repentance when we examine the people closely.

1. The people answer Jesus, **“God forbid!”** Please understand, they are NOT saying, *“We hope this doesn't happen.”* They were telling Jesus, **“This will not happen.”** Or **“God won't let this happen.”**

2. Jesus responds, **“What is the meaning of the prophecy in Psalm 118, ‘The stone the builders rejected...’**” They didn't think their church could reject God's Son, the Messiah. The leaders had already done so by not listening to him and soon they would throw him outside the city and have him killed. Jesus' call was that the leaders and the people needed to repent of this sin before it was too late.

3. We need to heed this call today. What makes a church and its ministry vital is not big Easter pageants and breakfasts. It is not beautiful music or large youth programs. What makes a church is when people listen to God's word. When these people and their pastor acknowledge that they have rejected God in their daily sins. When they are sorry for such sins and they look to God for mercy. This is true repentance. This is the reaction that Jesus wanted then and now.

B. A part of repentance is trusting in God's mercy. Jesus points to God's mercy in Psalm 118, **“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”?** [22] The “stone” is the son who was rejected in the parable.

When God's Son was rejected by the Jews he was crucified outside of Jerusalem. **This "stone" has become the "cornerstone."** The cornerstone in ancient times was the first stone in a building. (pic) From the cornerstone the lines for the entire building took shape. If the cornerstone was straight and true the walls would be straight and would not fall.

The imagery is simple. (pic) Jesus is our righteous Savior. By his sufferings and death he became the cornerstone of God's church. (pic) The church is made up of people. We have been made righteous and holy in Jesus. We are the stones or bricks that form the walls of the church. When we rest by faith in Jesus we are a part of God's church. (pic) St. Peter summarizes it this way, **"Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'"** (1 Peter 2:7)

3. A call to heed the consequences

Jesus does not merely say that some people will reject him, but he lays out the consequences. This is a final call to pay attention.

A. The consequences are not a minor slap on the hand. Jesus says, **"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."** (18) The leaders were in full attack mode. They were looking for opportunities to discredit Jesus and get rid of him. Jesus says that those who fall on him or attack him will be broken to pieces. Jesus also speaks of those who aren't attacking him, but the stone or the rock falls on them. These are the people who don't believe in Jesus, but they just want to go on with their lives and do what they want. When Jesus comes on Judgement Day, he will fall on them by casting them into Hell with the rest of his enemies.

It has become popular in our day and age to have churches either ignore Hell or to deny its existence. (*What's Going on Among Lutherans? Chapter 16, page 125.*) ELCA Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was interviewed by the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In the interview she was quoted as saying, *"If there is a hell, I think it is empty."*

(September 8, 2017) The whole purpose of denying the existence of hell is to deny eternal punishment. If this is the case why does Jesus say that those who reject him will be crushed and broken? Why in the book of Revelation does Jesus show St. John a lake of fire? Everything in Scripture calls on us to take Jesus' warning as pointing to a reality.

B. Verse 19 is not a part of Jesus' words, however it does provide us with an example of his words falling on deaf ears.

1. Luke reports, **“The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.”** (19) They might have said, “We don't like what you are saying, but you sound serious and we will think about what you have said.” That would have been a small change. They don't even consider his words, his warning. They look for ways to arrest him immediately.

A part of Jesus's persistent love is that he warns even his enemies. How much more should, you and I, his dear children, pay attention to what he says. What if I think, I have heard this all before, I am okay? Consider the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, **“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”** (12)

What is the solution so that we respond to Jesus' warning and don't take our salvation for granted? The answer is to be in the word. Psalm 119:105 provides an answer. **“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.”** If the light of God's word is shining in our lives, we will not go off the path of salvation. Jesus also said, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”** (John 10:27)

Conclusion: This is not the happiest of texts in the Bible. However, when you and I face a dire situation, we are usually not full of “sunshine.” Jesus is having one of his last encounters with his enemies. He loves his enemies. He is reaching out to them with an urgent warning. Perhaps some of them had a change of heart after Easter. However, the reality of Jesus' words came true. 30 years later Jerusalem was destroyed for its rejection of Christ.

You and I may struggle in living for Christ or in sharing him with others because we don't see a day of disaster in front of our eyes.

So Jesus' urgent words are important. He is the cornerstone of salvation. He is the one and only Savior. We need to repent of our sins and we need to trust in him for the forgiveness of sins.

His words of warning will keep us sharp. His words of hope will keep us strong. He will give us words to say to his enemies, because he loves all people and he wants them to repent before it is too late. This the reason for the urgent plea. Amen.

THE GOSPEL READING - Luke 20:9-19

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

13 “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

14 “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

“‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’[a]?”

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Footnotes: Luke 20:17 Psalm 118:22

THE GOSPEL READING - Luke 20:9-19

(NIV 2011)

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

13 “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

14 “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

“‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’[a]?”

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Footnotes: Luke 20:17 Psalm 118:22