

The title for today's message is: **Where's the Grace**

Jesus said: ***I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

If God is so good, and if God is so great, then why (you fill in the blank)? If God is so powerful, and if God is so loving then why (again you fill in the blank)?

Have you ever had someone ask you questions like that? Well, I certainly have and on numerous occasions.

An earthquake suddenly sends people scattering, buildings falling, and hillsides sliding. You might ask; Where's the grace in that?

A street party gets out of control, and people end up getting hurt, and even killed. You might ask; Where's the grace in that?

An airplane crashes killing men, women and children. You might ask; Where's the grace in that?

When someone wants to question the goodness and the greatness of our Lord, they feel they have more than enough ammunition on their side.

And since our Lord works in mysterious ways, and since He doesn't always explain to us exactly why He allows certain things to happen.

We can get caught off guard, and be unable to answer the accusations that so many people bring against Christians today.

Yet, that doesn't have to be the case, because right here in our text for today, were given the answer to most, if not all such accusations.

Luke tells us in our text, ***There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.***

Look, cold-blooded murder is a horrible crime no matter where, when, or how it happens.

And the murder of these Galileans, were even more shocking, since it took place while they were in church, offering sacrifices to God!

So we say, surely this massacre must have happened as a result of some terrible sin these Galileans had committed against God.

Or we say, surely they deserved it. Now, for many, that would be an easy explanation to such a tragedy.

That would be a nice "safe" way to explain why God would allow something like this to take place. Have you ever thought that way?

Have you ever looked at another person, perhaps even a fellow Christian, and said to yourself:

"It certainly doesn't surprise me at all, that so-in-so got caught doing something like that"

Or, have you ever looked at someone else's family, perhaps even a family here at church, and said to yourself, "I am so glad that my children would never do anything like that"?

It has oftentimes amazed me at how quickly, and how easily God's own people, can get caught up in the web of self-righteousness, and pride.

Jesus says in our text: ***“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.***

Look, every time someone dies “unexpectedly” or as we say “before their time,” and every time a disaster strikes, or an accident takes place.

We need to ask ourselves, “What if that had been me? Would I have been ready to stand before the Lord on judgment day?”

Look, for centuries now the Christian church has referred to our life here on earth as our, “time of grace.”

Now, a person's time of grace is their opportunity to come into contact with the grace of God, and then to grow in His grace.

But when a person's time of grace is over, that's it. They then stand before the Judge, Jesus Christ, and find out where they will spend eternity.

And Jesus makes it very clear here in our text, the importance of using our time of grace wisely.

Jesus said: ***“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’***

Now like all of Jesus' parables, this parable is very easy to understand, that is, when we simply apply it to ourselves.

Look, we are the fig trees. The vineyard is God's church, and the owner of the vineyard is our heavenly Father.

And finally the caretaker of the vineyard is our Lord. So by the power of the Holy Spirit we are brought to faith in Jesus, as our Savior.

Therefore you and I and all people of the world, are "planted" in the vineyard of God's church.

Every day our heavenly Father looks at our lives fully expecting to see the "fruits of faith, and repentance" in what we do, and in what we say.

Now when our heavenly Father doesn't see the fruit He expected to see, He exercises His divine patience, and waits.

That's right, like the caretaker in the vineyard, He gives us a little more time to grow. He gives us a little more time to mature.

He gives us a little more time to produce the fruits of faith and repentance in our lives.

But at the same time, our Lord's patience will come to an end. And we have ample evidence of that truth throughout the Scriptures.

For example: God's patience with this world came to an end in the days of Noah, and He destroyed the world by means of a flood.

And one day God's patience with this wicked world will also come to an end, and this world will be destroyed by fire.

Are you perhaps testing the limits of God's patience? Are you living your life with the attitude that you will quit doing this, or start doing that tomorrow?

Or, are you focused on yourself and the things you want first, and then later you'll start focusing more on your relationship with God.

You know, focusing on what God wants you to do today, and tomorrow. But remember, every moment of every day the Lord looks at the fig tree of your life.

All the while He is expecting to find in each one of us the fruits of faith and repentance.

And if He doesn't find any fruit, the day will surely come when He will say, "Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

Look, There's no escaping the fact that the majority of today's text is focused on the holy, just, and perfect Law of God.

Yet, if we have spent the last few minutes thinking to ourselves, how this or that portion of God's Word applies to others.

We will certainly realize how much this text actually convicts us all of our own sins. And we wonder, Where's the grace?

The grace of God is found right here in the simple words of the vineyard caretaker, he said to the owner: ***'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'***

Here, the grace of God glows warmly when we stop to remember who spoke these words, and why He spoke them.

Over and over the Lord reaches out to us with His holy Word and Sacrament to nurture, and to strengthen us, to feed and to fertilize our faith.

Have you ever stopped to think of how many opportunities we have to strengthen, nurture, and to exercise our faith right here in our own congregation?

All the opportunities we have in our personal life to grow in our faith and to exercise our faith by sharing our faith with others.

And if we fail, if we come up short, Jesus doesn't simply give up on us and leave us to our own demise, No!

He patiently calls us to repentance, and then diligently works even harder hoping that we will bear fruit before the time comes to cut us down.

Now I'm sure you have noticed that the Lenten season this year has been an especially difficult time for many people in our country.

You know, with the financial problems of today. We struggling each and every day, living in a world infected by sin.

Therefore, there will be many people who will look at their own life today and most likely ask the question, "Where's the grace?"

But know there's an answer for them, now we can answer them by saying; "God's grace is still right here, on the cross of Jesus Christ our Savior."

We say; "Let His cross be your guiding light, especially during the dark days in our life.

And, let His cross be our source of strength, especially on the days that we feel the weakest.

And finally; Let His cross be your motivation as you strive to be faithful productive fig trees, in the vineyard of God's church.

My friends keep the cross of Jesus Christ clearly before your eyes, and not only will you know how to answer these accusations.

But you will never find yourself asking the question, "Where's the grace?"

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.