

*At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."*

*6Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

God is being patient with you.

For three years there has been no fruit.

It is really time for the ax – every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. That is what John the Baptist said Jesus would do.

But Jesus has gone to the Father and begged one more year for you.

God is being patient with you.

Take no comfort that it is in Baghdad that the suicide bombers are striking.

Take no comfort that it is far away in Sudan that genocide is taking place.

Do not be lulled into complacency by the distance between your home and the crack houses in Lorain or East Cleveland.

Do not think you have God's special favor because none of your kids is divorced, or on drugs or seriously ill.

Do not be fooled into thinking that your money will save you.

Or your important job.

Or all the hours you spend at the church.

Or volunteering among the poor.

God is being patient with you.

Repent.

Let God's word go to work on you, cutting away illusion, pruning whatever is self-satisfied in you - chopping off self-centeredness.

Do not defend yourself – looking for reasons why you are already good enough – piling up excuses for why you do not change into the new creation Christ intends you to be.

God is being patient with you.

But if this word of God we have before us today is to be believed, God will not be patient forever. One more year the gardener begged. Put away the ax for one more year. Give them another chance to repent – I will go to work on them to make them great bearers of fruit.

If after a year there is no fruit, cut the tree down.

Repent.

Do you know what God wants to change in you? If you do not, ask someone who loves you – that person might have a suggestion.

Study the scriptures – listen to Jesus.

Look out the window and see your neighbors near and far. They might help you understand the turning God is seeking from you.

Repent.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses or statements for discussion to the church door in Wittenberg. The opening words of the 95 theses are these: “When our Lord and master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Luther's whole life – my whole life – your whole life a continual turning away from all that is not what God seeks for you and a continual turning to God - every day all your life.

God is being patient with you.

Jesus wants you to know that today.

And repent.