

**Minnesota Valley Church; Sunday, March 23, 2025;
3rd Sunday in Lent**

Prelude: Rebekah Olson

HYMN #557 “What Can Wash Away My Sin”

CALL TO WORSHIP: from Psalm 85

PASTOR: You showed favor to your land, O LORD;

ALL: you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

PASTOR: You forgave the iniquity of your people

ALL: And covered all their sins.

PASTOR: You set aside all your wrath

ALL: And turned from your fierce anger.

PASTOR: Restore us again, O God our Savior,

ALL: And put away your displeasure toward us.

PASTOR: The LORD will indeed give what is good,

ALL: And our land will yield its harvest.

PASTOR: Righteousness goes before him

ALL: And prepares the way for his steps.

HYMN #212 “Holy God, We Praise Your Name”

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE:

Reader: Dave Fischer

Old Testament Lesson: *Ezekiel 33:7-11 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 9 But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. 10 "Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and*

sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" ' 11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Epistle Lesson: *1 Corinthians 10:1-13 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. 6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did-and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: Apostles’ Creed- I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born

of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

Gloria Patri: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Announcements and Receive Offering

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: Songs to be chosen by Hannah

SERMON: “BAD THINGS HAPPEN” Luke 13:1-9 Pastor Tom Olson; *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen*

CANCER: This week I have been corresponding with a man from the Park River, North Dakota area. He is wrestling with this issue of Bad Things Happen. He is angry and bitter about a child who got cancer. Here is his statement about God, I quote: *“He (God) gives cancer, how loving is that?”* He goes on to compare God allowing a child to get cancer with a father who beats his child until that child has to be hospitalized. He writes: *“If a man beats his child so bad that the child needs to go to the hospital to receive care, is that an example of a loving father?”*

INTERACTION: He and I talked about it.

WRESTLING: The human race, for thousands of years, has been wrestling with this question about WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN. In Luke 13 this was the question that was on the mind of

his disciples. The response is interesting and educational. BAD THINGS HAPPEN, Luke 13, let’s talk about it:

I. BAD EVENTS BOTHER US

Luke 13:1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

TROUBLING: It bothers us when we see bad things happen. We hear about war and shudder. We hear about people getting cancer and weep. We see people lose their homes in fires or storms and are sad for them.

SITUATION: In this case it was the cruelty of the Romans. Pontius Pilate, the governor of the area, had defiled the temple in Jerusalem by killing some Galileans and mixing their blood with the blood of the spotless lambs on the altar. I would assume that these may have been some of the zealots who were trying to find a way to drive the Romans out of their land. Pilate likely wanted to make an example of them in order to scare the people into submission.

QUESTIONING: I am sure that the disciples were thinking, “If God really cared about us, why did he let this terrible thing happen?” Let’s be honest. Many of us have wondered at times why God lets bad things keep happening. Some people get bitter about it. Some of us go to the Word of God for answers. The disciples went to Jesus. God doesn’t mind it if you spill out your heart to him with grief and emotion when bad things happen. GOD DISLIKES BAD THINGS MORE THAN YOU DO. He understands our sadness.

INVITATION: That is why Jesus said in ***Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*** When bad things bother you, just be careful not to let them make you bitter. Let them bring you to God. Secondly...

II. BAD EVENTS WARN US

Luke 13:2-5 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

ISRAEL: The Old Testament is filled with warnings that if the people of Israel would embrace false gods and sinful ways, that God would allow bad things to happen to them. But they took these warnings out of context and developed the false doctrine that every time a bad thing happens to you, that it is God punishing you for sin.

JOB: Job experienced really bad things, but the Bible clearly says that it was not because He was being punished for sin. Listen to what God tells the devil about Job.

Job 1:6-8 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

MYSTERY: The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that the bad things that happened to Job were not a punishment for his sin. God had a different purpose in letting Job experience hard times. But Job's friends insisted that his suffering was because of his sin. That is what people believed in those days.

TOWER: Notice what Jesus says and doesn't say here. Jesus says that it was not because of their sins. Jesus brings up another example of a tragedy where a tower collapsed and eighteen people

died. Jesus emphatically says that it was not a punishment for being more sinful than other people.

SILENCE: Jesus, however, does NOT go into any detail about WHY it happened. He did not say why God lets the Romans hurt them. He did not say why God lets faulty construction collapse and hurt people. God never told Job why he was tested so severely, either.

MYSTERIES: God has not told us why some people get cancer and some don't. I likely got cancer from second hand smoke and the people who were smoking didn't get cancer. God has never told me why that is the case. The doctors had some theories. I have some ideas. But for the most part, bad things that happen are a mystery to me. Are you willing to live with unanswered questions? It is part of being human.

WARNING: Jesus goes on to tell them that when they see bad things happen, that they should be warned to repent of their sins or they will perish. I think it is fair to say that bad events warn us all to turn away from sin.

DISEASE: I asked a Christian with a terrible disease if they would be a believer if their life had been easy without that disease. The answer was, "Probably not." This is a reminder to me that God is working in our lives "case by case" for the best possible outcomes.

GOOD: That is why Romans 8:28 always works in the lives of the children of God, no matter what bad things happen to us. The verse you know so well says, ***"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes."***

COWPER: William Cowper lived in England about the time of the American Revolution. He suffered greatly with physical illness, an emotional disorder, and depression. Out of his suffering he penned one of the greatest hymns ever written, **"God Moves in a**

Mysterious Way.” Here is verse two which I don’t quote as often as others: *“Deep in unfathomable mines of Never-failing skill, God treasures up His bright designs And works His sovereign will.”* It is easy to accept the atonement of Christ, it is easy to accept the blessings of God but it is hard to accept the unexplained, sovereign permissive will of God that allows us to suffer. **BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE PEACE.**

CHARACTER: The way I cope with God’s permission to allow bad things, is to reflect upon His character. How can I not trust Jesus who died in my place on Calvary’s cross? How can I not trust the One who is preparing a place for me in heaven, who interceded for me before the Father’s throne? When things don’t make sense, I find peace in trusting God. It is just like going to the doctor and he says, “This is going to hurt,” I trust that the doctor is doing his best to set that bone or stitch up that wound for my good.

BAD EVENTS WARN US and finally...

III. BAD EVENTS MOTIVATE US

Luke 13:6-9 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

THREAT: The threat of cutting down the fig tree motivated the gardener to work harder to care for it so it might bear fruit. It often takes bad things to motivate us to do a better job.

EXAMPLES: Every time I see a bad car accident it helps me to drive more defensively. Every time I see someone with an illness it reminds me to try to eat healthful food and exercise more. The bad

things of this world help me to examine my own life. When I found out that I have a hole in my heart and have had two light strokes and in light of my 2007 fight with cancer, I have started listening to many lectures about health and nutrition and have made some adjustments in my lifestyle. It motivated me.

PEACE: The wars in Ukraine and Gaza and threats of nuclear bombs detonating are motivating many people to try to do a better job of building bridges of communication between nations. Peace talks are back on the table after well over a million people have been killed.

ANSWERS: The bitter questions that the heartbreaking pain of a father with a daughter who died of horrific cancer are motivating me to come up with better and more sensitive answers.

DEEDS: One of the best answers to the mystery of BAD EVENTS is not found in words, but DEEDS. When politicians were arguing about the response of FEMA and the federal government to hurricane Helene, Samaritan’s Purse and a group of Amish people were on site, helping people clean up and building tiny temporary dwellings for them before winter set in. The costs were paid by donations to Samaritan’s Purse and collections from the Amish community and not by the Federal government. The kind deeds of these Christians spoke louder than any theological debate on the reasons for BAD THINGS HAPPENING. The kind deeds were a powerful testimony of the difference God makes in our lives.

CHILD: What would you have said to the young North Dakota father who was bitter at God for allowing a little child to suffer so much? Here is my response, for what it is worth: *“I am a cancer survivor and a Christian. Cancer is from a fallen and cursed world. The world is this way because of our choice of sin over God. Jesus is coming back to set up his eternal kingdom with no pain, disease and death, perhaps soon. Why does He wait? He is waiting for you to receive His gift of eternal salvation He purchased for you by His choice to shed His innocent divine blood for you. He loves you and*

the pain of this world is erased when we die and go to be with Him in heaven. It is real. There are thousands of near-death experiences that give testimony to it. I accept the testimony of the Bible. When I quit fighting and received Jesus, I finally got peace.” I went on to say that the little child is no longer suffering and is waiting for him in heaven. That child doesn't want to come back to this painful world. That child is in blissful happiness right now.

CONCLUSION: I hope my words helped him. My conclusion is this: BAD THINGS HAPPEN, period, end of discussion. It is often impossible to know why. But it is an opportunity to demonstrate the love of God to those who are suffering. *May the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen*

Hymn #448 “O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee”

Lord's Prayer: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

Benediction & Doxology *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A-men. A-men. A---men.*

Postlude: Rebekah Olson