

O Lord, our gracious and merciful Father, grant us steadfastly to believe in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior; to confess Him fearlessly before men to the reproving of the unbelieving and the wicked. Strengthen us by Your Spirit to walk honestly as in the light of day, both privately and in public. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 15, p.41)

There were some present at that very time who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered them, "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. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And He told this parable: "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?' And he answered him, '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.'"

In Christ Jesus, who is faithfully the same yesterday, today and forever, dear fellow redeemed:

Peter, in his second letter makes these observations: "scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' ... But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come ..." And while there is a similar sobering warning in our text as well, we should observe this for our comfort: **Despite Our Unfaithfulness God Remains Faithfully Patient.**

I

We frankly like to overlook our many acts of unfaithfulness in regard to our Lord and seize upon the horrific reports of tragedies we hear about. We certainly sympathize with the victims of horrible events. But we are tempted to search for a reason such terrible things happened to those upon whom the tragedy befell in the hopes that

finding it we might personally feel safe. For example: that horrific shooting did happen in *Sin City*, Las Vegas after all! – right?

Instead of finding security in these kinds of events, your Lord would have you hear such reports as calls to personal repentance. Repentance, you see, is not a just once in a lifetime event for you. It is not even just the repeated responses to your major failings in this life for which you perhaps feel the deepest remorse. It is a daily activity, dare we say hourly, or even minute-by-minute.

Luther wrote in his large Catechism concerning the 5th petition: “If God does not forgive without stopping, we are lost.” Why? - because in this life we do not stop sinning. So if God never stops forgiving we best never stop repenting! Without continual repenting we are lost.

The day of God’s threatened judgment, whether it be on the final day or in this life, wickedness will be called to an end by our Lord. In our Gospel lesson we heard of the king who was having a wedding feast and invited his guests, but some killed his servants who were sent. So he sent his troops and destroyed them and sent out the invitation to others. This is one of the points of Jesus’ parable of the unproductive fig tree. The owner of the vineyard noticed that for three years there were no figs. Except for the intervention of the vinedresser, pleading for one more year of digging up the soil and spreading manure around it, it would have been cut down and cast into the fire.

Peter’s inspired words concerning the slowness of God’s threatened judgment were spoken in remembrance of the days of Noah. The scoffers of his day saw him building the ark on dry ground without water around and they taunted Noah and his sons as they continued diligently building, gathering and preaching repentance. But one day the rain started and the water would not recede until all mankind, except Noah and his family, were dead. So the slowness of God’s threatened judgment is not to be understood as unfaithfulness on His part, but something altogether different – “loving *patience*”.

So if you are impenitently holding on to what you have affectionately come to call your pet sin, do not interpret God’s withholding judgment upon you as ignorance, or apathy, or unfaithfulness. Jesus, who intercedes for you as did the vinedresser for the fig tree, may be asking for another period of time to awaken you to repentance. Did you hear the loud calls to repentance lately – named Harvey, Irma and Maria? – events like the Mexican earthquake, the Vegas’ mass shooting and the California wildfires?

There have been many a patient spouse who overlooked with forbearance and forgave the other for years, even decades. But then there was the last abusive binge, the last barrage of hateful words, the last pummeling of fists, the last act of unfaithfulness, which required judgment to be spoken. Of course, all such human judgments were never made in pure innocent victimhood with perfect patience and longsuffering. But with God both His time of longsuffering and final judgment are always absolutely perfect.

God's timing is never to be questioned by us, even though we can be found crying out to our Lord with the psalmist: "How long, O Lord, how long?" Think of God's timing in finally sending His Son. It took at least 4,000 years and the Apostle Paul observes: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, ... so that we might receive adoption as sons." Not a moment too early nor too late did God respond to our desperate need for a Savior. When the time will have fully come for you, my fellow redeemed, whether you face judgment in your death or on the last day when your Lord will judge all - living and dead, He graciously and patiently promises to give you the inheritance prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Meanwhile, as you express your repentance in words of contrition in private and in public, trust in your Lord's patient forbearance and forgiveness. It is found in that redemption planned from the beginning, when sin first entered God's perfectly created world. In truth it was planned well before the beginning, it was planned as we are told from eternity.

Think of that in terms of God's faithful patience, before the world was created God had planned your salvation. He did not scrap His plans of creation, but made all things, even you, knowing full well how unfaithful you would be. God forbid that knowing this, you ignore His regular calls to you in this sin-filled world to repent now. How precious is your Lord's faithful patience in your sight!

This perfect patient attitude which Jesus lived for you is yours now through faith. Trifle not with this gift. Parents and teachers think about this gift in Christ when you are tempted to unload upon your children and students and shout out in frustration, "*If I told you once, I've told 100 times?*" Or Spouses think about this gift of Christ's patience when you are tempted to punctuate your repeated criticisms of the other with the declaration: "*For the last ten, twenty years, you have done this or that again and again!*"

Through His Apostle, our Lord instructs us that love keeps no records of wrongs. Our gracious Lord, who produced a life of perfect love for us, removes our sins as far as the east is from the west; He

remembers them no more. He was the One who when nailed upon the cross of our salvation prayed: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

Can you, knowing and trusting in this, show impatience to your fellow sinners - joining Peter in his infamous question of Jesus: *"How often shall I forgive my neighbor, seven times?"* We live a life of receiving unrelenting patience, my fellow redeemed, from our merciful and most patient Lord. Pray that your Lord who has dug around you today, fertilizing your faith, will have the joy of seeing the fruit of patient love for your many neighbors to His glory alone. Amen.