

It could never happen to me! I get my checkups and screenings regularly and they would catch it before it became untreatable. It could never happen to me! I don't even use Bluetooth while driving and I certainly don't drive past bar time. It could never happen to me! Who would want to invade somewhere like La Crosse; they would invade Madison or Milwaukee first. It could never happen to me! I got all my shots and I wear a mask in public.

A police officer switched careers to go to seminary. When a seminary professor asked him why, he stated that he couldn't keep knocking on doors to inform next of kin of a loved one's passing. The seminary professor then asked, what did the family member usually say? She said, "I told him not travel that day." When disaster strikes, we engage our brains; we try to think about what would have gone differently. We try to rationalize suffering.

And so we see that's what's going on in our text. Today in our Gospel text, they had the same problems in those days that we have today. There's people trying to rationalize the disasters of their day.

Two events we don't know much about: one that's an evil act of man, the other is an evil act of nature. The first one is the instance of Pilate mingling the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices. The best way that we can reconstruct this scenario was that Pilate sent his soldiers into the temple during the Passover celebration and murdered some Galileans while they were offering their lambs as sacrifice. That would be comparable to a gunman attacking a church during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The second event seems a bit more self-explanatory. Building collapses are perhaps a bit rarer nowadays, but even today at a party a balcony can collapse suddenly injuring and killing people. A tree branch can fall and damage a house. A flood can destroy property.

Yet Jesus cautions us against this "It could never happen to me!" attitude. Don't think that these people were worse sinners. Don't think that they had it coming. Maybe someone would rationalize saying, "The Galileans should have looked behind their back. They should have brought security along." Don't think, "The people in Siloam, they should have known what danger they were getting into. They should have consulted a structural engineer." These weren't worse sinners. Yet we use our brains to try to figure out why there is suffering.

What about when "It could never happen to me!" Happens to me? I surmise these are the things that keep us up at night. To be certain, the ten o'clock news has its fair share of pain and suffering: wars, pandemics, and the local crime segment. But the things that bother us, that might drive us to drink are the tragedies that happened in our life, some through our own fault, some for reasons we're still trying to figure out. 3. We try to rationalize suffering.

As we look at our text for today, Jesus doesn't give the answer many of us are expecting. Twice he tells us **"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."**

These things we see in the news; these things we see in our lives. Certainly, they're bad. Certainly, they're evil. We wouldn't wish some of these things on our worst enemies. But when we see these things, it isn't a call to rationalize. It isn't a call anxiously to prepare. It is a call to repent. It. Could. Happen. To. You.

Even the healthiest individual could die of a stroke at a moment's notice. Even the safest driver could be killed in a car crash. You don't need to be in a warzone to be killed in a random act of violence. Even those who live in a boring state like Minnesota or Wisconsin without hurricanes, tsunamis, or volcanoes. We could still die at the hands of Mother Nature.

It could happen to us. Each day could be our last day on Earth. Jesus reminds us where our true security lies. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Those who live apart from Christ have a legitimate reason to fear death. Our culture and society lies to us saying that death is the end. That itself is a terrifying proposition and perhaps why we saw what could be categorized as hysteria in the COVID-19 pandemic.

But it's worse than that. Jesus Himself teaches us in the Gospels that those who die apart from trusting Him **"...will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** They will go away **"...into eternal punishment."** In short, Jesus teaches that those who reject Him will go to hell. There's no way to sugarcoat it, but to be a Bible-believing Christian is to accept this reality taught by our Lord Himself.

What this means is that if you deny Christ, you could be nestled away in a fortress. You could have the cleanest bill of health. You could have the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division of the United States Army serving as your personal bodyguard. Nonetheless, your life is lived tottering on the precipice between life and eternal punishment in hell. **"Unless you repent you will likewise perish."**

But for Christians, the opposite is true. Hear the words of Jesus, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."** To believe in Christ and trust in Him as your Savior means that even now we are living in the eternal blessedness of Heaven even now. No calamity, disaster, or crisis can snatch us from our Heavenly Father's hand.

What this means is the Christian woman with stage four cancer has a better prognosis than the atheist who has never been sick a day of his life. The Christ-follower whose life flashes before his eyes as he is about to die in a car crash has a brighter future than the agnostic Fortune 500 C.E.O. who has succeeded in every earthly way up to this point in her career. Fellow Lutherans of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in Ukraine are in better hands worshipping in a subway with dust falling from the ceiling as rockets demolish buildings above ground than atheist humanists holding up peace signs in downtown La Crosse.

Nonetheless, these disasters we see in the news. The bad things that happen in our life and the lives of those we love are all wake up calls, reminding us that only those who stand firm in the faith to the end will be saved. These tragedies and sufferings serve as opportunities to wake up and realize that this life is not all there is, and to cling to the promises of Christ. 2. Christ calls us to use suffering as a wake-up call.

When disaster strikes, don't rationalize the sufferings of others to assure your safety. Know that your safety lies in Christ's hands alone. Turn from your sin. Know that you have heaven waiting for you. But when we face suffering and catastrophes in our own lives, we look to Christ to get us through it.

And Lent matters, we need to understand that Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. The most profound statement that Christianity has to offer on the question of disasters whether they be manmade or natural is that God sent His only Son to suffer and die. The most profound symbol of Christianity is the cross which tells us, yes, God allows suffering, but God suffers alongside us in His Son Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "It could never happen to you!" But it did. Jesus did suffer, die, and was buried. The unthinkable happened to Jesus. He was arrested. He was tortured. He faced excruciating pain. Even the Father abandoned Him as He took on the sins of the world. He breathed His last and died.

He did all this so that when suffering strikes, you know that you are not alone. He took on the sins of the world including yours. He took on pain so that when you're writhing in a hospital bed, you can lean on Him for strength. He faced abandonment and rejection so that when you're crying alone, you're really not alone. He died for you that on the day of your death you need not be afraid.

He rose promising you too will rise again. He rose promising that even suffering has its end. He rose demonstrating that evil doesn't win, and that even death will die one day. 1. Christ calls us to identify his suffering with His.

As Christians, we are called to make reasonable preparations to assure our safety. Rather than leaning on "It Could Never happen to me!" Lean on your loving savior, of whom we say, "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**" Use sufferings as a way to draw closer to Christ whose comfort shines through even in our crosses. Know that even in the worst circumstances, you are safe in the arms of your Heavenly Father. **CHRIST USES SUFFERING NOT TO ENGAGE OUR MINDS BUT DRAW US CLOSER TO HIS HEART.**