Pick up newspaper or turn on the news. One thing that stands out everyday is death. 200 are killed in Nigeria. A car accidents claims lives of 3 people. 47 die in a China chemical blast. 71 die in a ferry accident. There are countless shootings and other accidents that claim peoples' lives. Everyday the obituaries are filled with names.

Why so many deaths around the world and many of them seem to be meaningless? We Christians may grieve over the loss of life as this. But is that all these deaths tell us? Every accident - every death we read about - are reminders. Reminders that everyone needs to repent.

That is the point Jesus makes in text today. So LET'S HEED CHRIST'S CALL TO REPENTANCE. Let’s heed it because repentance is necessary and let’s do it while there is still time to repent.

Twice in text Jesus says very emphatically: But unless you repent, you will all perish too. From Jesus’ words we learn that repentance is necessary.

Jesus gave this response to statements and questions raised about the deaths of a number of people in Jerusalem. He used this opportunity to speak about repentance. Jesus pointed to these deaths as reminders to repent.

While Jesus was passing through Galilee, on his way to Jerusalem, some people brought some terrible news. We are told: At that time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

The people brought this up, not to show how terrible Pilate was to commit this crime of murder, but rather to point to the violence of the deaths. They were shocked that this murder happened while the people were offering their sacrifices. Apparently, these Galileans were God-fearing people.

The people assumed that those who died had committed some great sin for which God was punishing them. The sin may have been secret, but the violence of their death seemed to point that such a great sin was committed.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked: Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered these things? In other words, were they worse sinners because they died like that? Does their death prove they were great sinners?

Sometimes we cannot help but wonder why such disasters fall on some people while others are untouched. We wonder that when friends encounter hard times or we ourselves suffer sickness, accidents or death of loves ones. We may even be tempted to think that these things happened to some people because they were worse sinners than others.

That is what the people around Jesus were wondering. But in his answer, Jesus firmly rejects the idea that the suffering and death of those people was because of some great sin. Jesus answered with the strongest way to deny something in the Greek language: I tell you, no. He then focused on what was more important - the issues of eternal life. These worshipers were no more guilty than others. But unless you repent, Jesus continued, you will all perish too.

Jesus then brought up another incident that happened in Jerusalem. Or those 18 who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think that they were worse sinners than all the people living in Jerusalem? This was not a case of cold-blooded
murder. This was just an accident in which 18 people lost their lives. Again, people assumed that those people died because of some sin that they must have committed and for which they were now being punished.

Again, Jesus gives the same emphatic denial: I tell you, no. Unless you repent, you will all perish too. With the same warning, Jesus emphasized the importance of repentance. His warning is clear. All sinners, unless they repent, would meet a terrible end - an even worse fate than those of whom Jesus speaks in text.

We have same reminders today. Just read through newspapers or listen to news - 10 die here, another 25 there and so on. We have all these reminders before us, reminding us to be filled with repentance.

What is repentance? Repentance involves a change - a change of heart and life. It includes sorrow over sins. Repentance is not just breaking bad habits, but it is turning from sin to righteousness. That means we understand from God’s law what sin is as well as God’s just punishment every sinners deserves.

Repentance also includes faith. Yes, it is sorrow over sins, but it also relies on God’s mercy and forgiveness found in Jesus. By our God-given faith, we trust Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation. Out of love and thankfulness to God for his free gifts, we then bring forth fruits of faith in a life which is pleasing to God.

Jesus tells us repentance is necessary. Why is it necessary? Jesus says: Unless you repent, you will all perish too. Jesus is not saying that unless we repent, we are going to suffer violent deaths like those he mentions. But those who do not repent will face the wrath of a holy and just God and that is worse.

Repentance is necessary because we need to be mindful of our sins. Sin is the cause of all evil in the world. The calamities around us serve as warnings for us against sin itself and its eternal effects. Yes, we need to be mindful of our own sins - God’s law shows us that. His gospel then shows us our Savior from, Jesus Christ, who died and took our sins away.

Since we sin everyday, repentance will then be a daily thing. To die in a particular sin, not wanting to repent of it, will harm your soul eternally. As Jesus says: Unless you repent, you will all perish too. This repentance is not just for obvious sinners, but for all of us. No one can have eternal life without repentance. Without repentance, you will perish eternally in hell.

So what will we do then? Obviously, we will want to repent. We still have time to repent. Jesus shows us this with a parable. The parable describes the life he expects of people in the world, to make use of the time we still have.

Jesus says in parable: A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it, but he did not find any. The owner of the vineyard in parable had planted a particular fig tree for the express purpose of producing figs. He expected this. Every time he went out to check, he hoped to find something, but was only met with disappointment.

So he said to the gardener, Look, for 3 years now I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Cut it down. Why even let it use up the soil? For 3 years he came out looking for fruit, any fruit, but he found nothing. That is why he ordered: Cut it down. The owner’s demand was fair and just. He felt the only thing left for him to do was have the tree cut down to make room for another tree which would produce fruit.

But then the gardener says: Sir, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down. The gardener pleads for one more year. He did not want to see the tree destroyed. He promised to do everything he could to care for the tree so it might become fruitful.

Now Luke does not give us the interpretation of this parable, but its meaning is clear.
God is the owner of the vineyard. God is patient and long-suffering. He has given us all what’s called a time of grace - the time in which we learn of God’s grace in Christ. But this time of grace does not last forever.

We need to keep that in mind. In his law, God threatens just punishment for sin. He wants us to repent. He also demands that we produce fruit in keeping with repentance. What are these fruits of repentance? Remember repentance is a change and these fruits of repentance are the various acts that show this change of heart.

If God does not see repentance and its fruit, he has every right to order: Cut it down. We do not deserve anything from God because of our many sins.

But our gardener, Jesus Christ, intercedes for us to give us more time. As John writes: If anyone does sin, we have an advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the righteous One. Yes, thank God that Jesus intercedes for us. He speaks to the Father in our defense. His intercession for us is based on his atoning sacrifice which removed all our sins.

God’s righteousness of the law demands that the ax be laid to our roots. But that is why Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He was going there to die. By his death, God forgave our years of unfruitfulness. God’s Holy Spirit then gives us the strength to produce fruits which are pleasing to God.

God the Father is patient with us. He hears the intercession of his Son. He gives us a time of grace. Peter writes that God is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. He spares us so that we may have sufficient time to repent.

Yet at the same time he warns us not to let this time of grace pass by in impenitence. Those who receive this time of grace are to bear fruit. Where this is still lacking, even the most loving patience of God must come to an end and justice be carried out. As Jesus states in parable: If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down. The one who rejects God’s grace seals his own everlasting doom.

We do not know when our time of grace will come to an end. We do not know when we will die. So let’s use the time we have left wisely. We will want to use this time of grace to bring forth fruits of repentance. We do not want to be caught unawares or in sin and unrepentant. We want to be ready.

I mention these things, not to scare you, but rather to alert you. Yes, be alert and be concerned now about that which really matters in life - our souls and eternal life with our Lord.

Yes, every time we pick up the paper and read of the tragic events of this life, they serve as earnest warnings to all of us. So let’s heed Christ’s call to repentance. Repent while there is still time. Repent before it is too late. For when our Lord comes to look for fruit, may we then, with repentant hearts that trust in our Savior Jesus Christ, be found ready and so be received into heaven. Amen.

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