

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Two weeks ago, Jesus did battle against the devil and defeated him, and the devil left him — but not for good. Jesus would eventually destroy the ancient serpent, delivering the head-crushing blow from the cross, but the devil remains our enemy.

Last week, Jesus took on the world, another dangerous enemy of mankind. That time, it was the Pharisees that sought to get in the way of cross and death, and therefore in the way of our salvation. Jesus brushed them aside saying, “*I [must] finish my course*” (Luke 13:32), which He did as He ascended the cross and gave up His life unto death. Yet we remain in the world (John 17:14-16), and try as we might not to conform to the world (Rom. 12:2), we do, for the world still assails us. The world remains our enemy.

Today Jesus instructs us about the third of our enemies, and perhaps the most pernicious for it’s the hardest to admit. Ever since the garden, man is wont to avoid the blame. You recall how it happened in the garden: God confronted Adam: “Did you eat?” Adam squirmed at the question. “Not my fault, God. It was the woman—she’s to blame. She gave me the fruit and I ate. It was the woman YOU gave me” (Gen. 3:11-12).

“What did you do?” God asked the woman. “Not my fault, God. It was the serpent that deceived me. He’s to blame” (Gen. 3:13). And ever since, mankind has been saddled with this original sin of Adam, as St. Paul says, “*by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners*” (Rom. 5:19)—conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). And because of this inward sin—Luther identifies it as “our sinful nature” and the “old Adam in us” ... because of this inward sin, we sin.

Moreover, even if we admit it — which Christians do, like we did a bit earlier: “I, a poor, miserable sinner confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserved your temporal and eternal punishment”—but even if we admit it, we often will try to justify ourselves, “Yes, but my sin is not as bad” ... as his ... or as hers. As if that makes my sin “righteous” all of the sudden! It does not.

That’s what certain people were trying to get Jesus to admit in the Gospel, as they told Jesus “*about [some] Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*” Even today, we think of this kind of action as being particularly heinous—the slaughter of people while worshiping or in their house of worship. So, the whether the massacre at the mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand killing 50 persons, or the one at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburg killing 11, or the

one at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, killing 26 persons, we find these murderous acts abhorrent, as we do Pilate's killing of the Galileans in the temple.

But Jesus knew what those people were thinking. They were thinking that *“these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way.”* I'm sure you've heard some pop Christian leaders who have talked that way, too. But Jesus doesn't permit that kind of thinking. *“No, I tell you,”* He said.

Jesus gave another example, that of a *“tower in Siloam [that] fell and killed [eighteen]”* people. Similarly, He asked, *“do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?”* But Jesus is not interested in “comparative sinning.” He wouldn't let His hearers fool themselves under the dangerous delusion that some sins are bad and worthy of condemnation, while other sins, though not good, don't merit God's death sentence. *“No, I tell you,”* Jesus said.

But there's another way that our inbred sin deludes us — it deludes us into claiming that God is at fault, that He is not just. Remember how Adam said it? *“The woman YOU gave me.”* So really, YOU'RE at fault God! Remember, too, how the Lord told Ezekiel what the people were saying? *“The way of the Lord is not just ...”* when He punishes those who do injustice. But it is not unjust to punish sin. And death was the consequence told to Adam in the garden for law breaking.

And yet, God does provide a way of escape from His own unyielding justice, from His righteous but dreadful sentence for sin. God had compassion and sent His own Son down from His side in the weakness of mortal flesh, and God meted out justice on His Son instead of us, placing the load of our sin upon Him and carrying out our death sentence on Him. As St. Paul says, *“for all [people] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”* By this act of grace, God demonstrates how He became for us both the One who is *“just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:23-26).

Thus, Jesus points us to faith in the Gospel — not that the word “faith” is used here by Jesus or the Evangelist, but it's there nonetheless. It's in the word *“repent,”* for this is what repentance is. It's your godly sorrow for sin, and it's faith that trusts in Jesus' bloody absolution. Thus, Jesus said to the people wondering if perhaps those Galileans were horrible sinners because of their irreverent death: *“unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Jesus said it again to people wondering if perhaps those eighteen had done something to cause their untimely demise: *“unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* Indeed, this Jesus is the same Lord who told the prophet to say: *“turn back from your evil ways,”* lest you die. Say to the sinner, my pleasure is that you *“turn from [your] way and live.”*

Therefore, woe to this watchman if he does not say to you: “Repent! Turn from wicked ways and live. Listen not to your sinful flesh,” for to *“live according to the flesh [is to] set [your] mind on the things of the flesh,”* and *“to set the mind on the flesh is death,”* to set *“the mind ... on the flesh is [to live in] hostil[ity] to God”* (Rom. 8:5-7).

Repent, and live according to the Spirit, full of life and peace, pursuing righteousness. Live as the baptized in daily contrition and repentance, daily drowning that sinful nature that assails you from within. Drown that “old Adam in you” as you remember your baptisms. Drown him along “with all sins and evil desires,” so that “a new man [may] daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (Luther, Small Catechism, Baptism).

Repent, and *“bear fruit in keeping with repentance”* (Matt. 3:8) as John the Baptist taught. A lack of fruit means a lack of repentance, a lack of faith. A fruitless person is a faithless person, and he is like a diseased tree that *“is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Matt. 7:17-19), a fruitless fig tree in the Lord’s vineyard set to be cut down.

And this isn’t unjust. After all, the Lord doesn’t want anyone to *“perish, but that all should reach repentance”* (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord *“is patient”* (2 Pet. 3:9) and continues to dig and fertilize hoping for fruit. Therefore, repent, and bear the fruit of the Spirit in *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control”* (Gal. 5:22-23), but don’t place your trust in these. Trust in Christ crucified for you; rejoice in the freedom Christ won for you, and don’t *“use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”* (Gal. 5:13).

You are baptized; you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Live like the baptized. Sow to the Spirit, not to the flesh, and reap the bounty of eternal life in Christ (Gal. 6:8).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.