**Isaiah 55:1-2 & 6-9**

**55 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.**

**6Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;7let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 9For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

**Luke 13:1-9**

**13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”**

**6Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ 8He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”**

**Title: The fruit of Repentance.**

**We’re heading towards Easter, the road to Jerusalem and the Cross. The road to Jerusalem includes temptation – especially the temptation to ease the journey, escape suffering and the horror of the Cross.**

**The road to Jerusalem includes perseverance – the endurance to go on, step by step and not be put off by threat or danger. We must carry on the good work while we have opportunity.**

**Today, we see, the road to Jerusalem is a road marked by the fruit of repentance. The cross of Christ provides us with an examination like no other because it calls us to look deeply and honestly into our lives. Into our motives, our attitudes and the hidden parts of our lives which we want no one to know about.**

**The context of the mass shooting in Christchurch will for some time be a context from which we in which we draw our application of scripture from. In the Luke reading we have 2 references to mass killings or deaths. The first thing to note is that violence towards others, while they are at worship, is nothing new. The first incident is a reference to an unknown event when a group of Galileans were killed by Pilate’s henchmen. Galileans were known for being rebellious and for causing uprisings. Galilee was as far from Jerusalem as you can get in Israel and so, there was obviously scope for rebellious ideas to develop. When these Galileans went to the Temple to sacrifice, they must have gotten into trouble, there was a mass killing and Pilate was said to have mixed their blood in with the blood of the sacrificed animals. This would have been the height of insult: up there with the sacrifice of pigs on the altar, by the Greeks in the Maccabean period, a couple of hundred year’s earlier.**

**We don’t know what actually happened, but one scenario is that, once a year the laity – non-priests - got to perform the ritual animal sacrifices as a part of worship. If these Galileans were doing just that when Pilate’s men descended on them, then quite literally their blood would have been mixed with the sacrificial blood. But even if this group was attacked having gone to all the effort to get to Jerusalem for worship, and were attacked going to the temple or even in some part of it, people could have said Pilate mixed their blood with the blood of the sacrifices.**

**I know, its not very nice thing to talk about, seeing as we’ve all likely been traumatized by attacks on people in worship.**

**So, did they get attacked because they were worse sinners than others? Was this some form of karma? Had they done bad things and so were getting bad in return? No, Jesus said: they were no worse than anyone else, and no their sin was not being punished when they were killed.**

**Likewise, 18 people had been killed in a disaster when the tower of Siloam fell down. Were they worse sinners than others who escaped with their lives? Maybe, someone had stopped to get MacDonalds on the way to the tower and so were late and the tragedy had taken place before they got there? Were they blessed when the others were judged?**

**Again Jesus says no these people were no better or worse sinners than anyone else. We’re all sinners. This is highly pertinent. When Christchurch had it’s earthquakes people asked – do you think that it was because Christchurch, with Christ in its name, was being judged for not living up to its name? Is Christchurch a worse city than Dunedin or Auckland? No, they’re just cities that are further away from a fault line.**

**Stupidity would ask – was Christchurch being judged again last week? Did those families deserve to be attacked in the mosques? But, this is not an isolated event. Islamic attacks on Christians at worship have been reported – in January 2019 in Mindanao southern Philippines, also historically in Nigeria and in Egypt – were they Christians who were being judged in some way?**

**Jesus response – here and consistently was: No! A person’s fortune or misfortune was not because of their own merit or demerit. We must eliminate such thinking. Was I blessed by God to be able to fly to Scotland, but the people on the Malaysian airlines plane which went down in the sea cursed?**

**We live in a fallen world where, “stuff happens”. There is often no rhyme nor reason behind an injury, an illness or something else bad happening. Jesus wise words drive us not to conjecture about other people, but to be sober about ourselves.**

**Commentator I H Marshall writes: ‘the point is then that natural calamities’ (and I would add unnatural ones as well man made calamities) ‘afford no proof that those who suffer in them are any worse sinners than anybody else: far more important is the fact that all sinners face the judgement of God unless they repent.’ Jesus was saying: we all need to ensure our relationship with God is good and ongoing and so be ready at any time.**

**‘Be warned, unless you repent you too will perish.’ Not that the same kind of thing would happen to them, but that at their death they will be separated from God. They will perish.**

**Repentance – turning to face God through Christ – a life once turned away from God now, a life turned towards God. We have been given the ability to choose**

**We like Jesus meek and mild, we like Jesus healing and telling bad people of their fate, but such harsh words from Jesus are a warning for us. Jesus just states it as it is. Its not ours to judge others but, for ourselves, we are to constantly examine ourselves, allowing the light of the Holy Spirit to shine into our lives and so we can see what evil lurks within.**

**Jesus stands here in the line of the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah where we read -**

**6Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; 7let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

**Or, the condemnation of making sin offerings, but not turning from sin, Psalm 51: 6You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
    you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
17My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
    a broken and contrite heart
    you, God, will not despise.**

**The fig tree is an image of Israel. Israel was identified as being a fruitless nation. But whereas elsewhere, reference to the fig tree results in Jesus cursing it and it withering and dying, here the plea goes out by the gardener, please I’ll look after it, leave it for one more year, and then if there’s still no fruit then it can come out.**

**And so we hear in our ears the words: call upon the Lord while he might be found. In other words, there is a season where there is a chance for repentance and there is a time when it will be too late. That would be when we no longer have control of our lives to choose Christ’s way.**

### **We are not to be led astray with the thought that once forgiven, always forgiven. We are to live as people freed from sin we are to be dead to sin and alive to Christ. The proof of our repentance is a changed life. Our lives are to show the fruit of repentance.**

**Pause & look up.**

**Listening to the rhetoric in the media over the last week, I note that after our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, who has done a wonderful job, not just talking about a human response, but showing one. However, I heard her say she would not use the murd accused’s name. Since then media have also dropped the use of his name and now just talk about the “murderer accused.” The danger is that we de-humanize and distance ourselves from evil and terror.**

**Yes, we want to say to the Muslim community “they are us”, to say we are all one in the world. And rightfully we stand against terror. But in the context of the warning of Jesus to repent we can ask ourselves: is there anything I need to repent of here? How do the events of last Friday shine a spotlight on my life?**

**We might not be propagating hate via social media in a way which fuels violence – although I’ve seen some pretty nasty stuff spread by Christians which fuels suspicion and “us/them” sentiments. There is a sad amount of derogatory material which goes on between Christians of one view against other Christians who are different.**

**John taught that ‘perfect love casts out all fear’. There is of course a natural fear which keeps us from danger, but do we harbor fear of people of different colour, different language, culture, religion.**

**Do we carry prejudices and biases of superiority?**

**Do you remember when Pacifica immigrants were called “coconuts”? What racial slurs still exist?**

**Despite attempts to expose bullying and abuse, what attitudes still exist towards women in the workforce?**

**What attitudes do we carry towards gays and lesbians?**

**Do we harbor anger or un-forgiveness? Unresolved hurt can lead to our lashing out and taking revenge on someone.**

**What attitudes boil to the surface when we see an Asian driver cut us off, as opposed to a white middle-aged male? What riles in us when we smell the odor coming off someone who eats different food to us?**

**It is true to affirm with people of difference who live in New Zealand – we are like you, but there is a danger, if we de-humanize evil and see it as “out there” not “in here”.**

**Of course there is more to ask about ourselves than what prejudiced attitudes we carry towards other people and in what way do we consider ourselves to be supreme over others? We can also ask, what way does greed blind us to the needs of others. We can consider, our sexual appetites and Jesus’ challenge that to look at another with lust is the same as adultery. We can look at anger in ourselves and again be humbled by Jesus who said if we call someone a fool we are in danger of the fire of hell.**

**But today the main thing in context of our news is – to think about the attitudes we carry, often because of fear, towards people of difference.**

**Can we pray, search me O God? Do we have the courage? Because an inward look is a difficult look. We can’t change others, but we are responsible for ourselves.**

**We might go from here today thinking: ‘well I’m going to give up, this is too difficult, I can never live up to Jesus’. Remember the grace offered to the fig tree; ‘one more year’. The attitude is this: that we are open to God changing us. The moment our attitudes harden and our views become set in concrete, then God’s Spirit is locked out and can do no more in our lives. So, relying on God’s forgiveness gives us the space to grow and to change.**

**Fruit are seen as the result of our lives, the outward evidence of our inner lives. What fruit does your/ my life display? Is it the fruit of humility? The fruit if repentance?**

**Pray with me if you dare and then we’ll pause in silent reflection to make a personal response. -**

**Search me, God, and know my heart;
    test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24See if there is any offensive way in me,
    and lead me in the way everlasting.**

**Prayer of response.**