

Understanding suffering

Notes on the Bible readings

- The passage in Luke describes a conversation that many of us have had with God – why does suffering happen? Those speaking with Jesus refer to two recent local incidents – the death of some Galileans at the hands of Pilate, while they offered their sacrifices, and an accident in which a tower fell on 18 people. These stories could easily be replaced by similar incidents in today's news.

- Jesus doesn't give a clear answer to the question, but takes the opportunity to distinguish between the things that are the result of sin, and those that aren't. Personal sin doesn't lead to death; we will all die sometime and we won't have control over where and when. However, the perishing of the soul is a different matter and Jesus says that we can be saved from eternal death if we choose to repent (v.5).

- The parable of the fig tree reinforces the point. After being barren for three years, the farmer is persuaded by the gardener to give it one more year to bear fruit. Similarly, we are given a second chance to repent and bear fruit for God in our lives (cf. Luke 3.8). This is echoed in Isaiah 55.7 where the prophet urges the exiled Israelites to 'return to the Lord' and make the most of the new life God is offering them. However, since we do not know when our lives will end, there is an urgency to the need for repentance.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ What is your response to natural disasters?
- ▶ How do you cope with suffering in the world?
- ▶ How do you face up to your own mortality?



A prayer of adoration

Your thoughts are not our thoughts, your ways are not our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways, so are your thoughts higher than our thoughts. To you we come in adoration. To you we come in worship. To you we come, to gaze upon your holiness and give thanks. Amen.

A prayer for others

*God of Grace, we pray for those who live in areas of conflict and violence where bullets and bombs bring destruction and devastation – may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.
We pray for those who suffer the pain of famine and drought and the after-effects of natural disaster – may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.
We pray for those who suffer the pain of illness and disease, their own or that of a loved one – may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.
We pray for those who suffer the grief and torment of bereavement – may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.
God of love, we humbly offer to you all the suffering of our world, and we pray that you will bring healing and peace; for the sake of your dear Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

A personal prayer

Pray for anybody that you know who is going through a rough time at present. Pray that God will be with them and give them healing, strength and peace.

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Live your faith

Look for an opportunity to let someone who is suffering or hurt know that they are loved and cared for – by you and by God. Be prepared to give Jesus' answer to a 'Why me?' question.