In today's gospel text we find Jesus continuing in what is rather a lengthy discourse with His disciples and a large crowd that had gathered. He is now within the final months of His ministry. If we were to read from the beginning of this sermon, we can detect that Jesus' message is increasing in urgency.

It says, "At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." So, there were some people in the crowd who were sharing with him what would have been front-page news. It was shocking, sudden; they were taken-by-surprise. It was swift; it was brutal. Pilate, known for his brutality, had ordered the slaughter of Jews on their way to offer their sacrifices. It says their blood was mingled with their own sacrifices.

Instead of expressing shock or dismay, Jesus turns the news around on them. He knows what some of their beliefs were: Remember Job? If something bad happens to you, well, you must DESERVE it. In John 9, of a man blind from birth, Jesus was asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus knows their beliefs, but again, in usual Jesus fashion, He contradicts how they want Him to respond.

"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way that they were worse sinners that all other Galileans?" He's telling them, "NO! It wasn't because they were necessarily bad; it wasn't because they were doing the wrong thing. They were off doing what they were SUPPOSED to be doing. It wasn't divine judgment. It was just life. Life happens. Death happens, and it can happen suddenly to anyone."

So, when I thinking about Jesus' response, I asked myself, Haven't we all played the villan in someone else's story? I know there must be at least one person on this planet who thinks I deserve to have a piano dropped on my head. But I think I've also played the hero a time or two, as well. So who's right? Am I a villan or a hero? Haven't we all been both good and bad? And, we are very comfortable thinking that if by the time our lives are over, that if the bad isn't too bad, and the good out-weighs the bad, we're good to go. We are bound for the promise land.

But that's not God's economy. God's weights-and-measures are different than ours, and we have a hard time accepting that. We have a hard time accepting that maybe, just maybe, God loves our enemies, or "bad people", just as much as He loves us,

and we need to repent just as much as they do. When we think we don't NEED to repent, that's when we are in trouble.

Jesus went on to say, "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." Repentance. He doesn't try to defend God concerning why bad things happen to good people. He doesn't take that route. He tells them, unless you repent you will ultimately perish. Life is short. Time is ticking. Chance is fickle. We don't know from one day to the next what is going to happen.

He said, using another example, "Or 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

But don't we think like this sometimes? Why did that tornado wipe out that town, why is flooding washing their homes away, why did cancer snuff out her life so young? Why did he die in a car wreck? Doesn't God love me? Am I being punished? Jesus could have addressed their question the way they wanted, but He didn't. He knew full-well that these were tragedies of tragedies. But as it says in Matthew 5, God makes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. We think the house should fall on the Wicked Witch of the West and the good should grow old and die peacefully. Jesus is reminding them that we are all in the same boat, and unless we repent, we will perish in the lasting sense.

Because we all need to repent.

When we get to verse 6, Jesus appears at first glance to switch gears and gives a horticultural lesson. In this parable, "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So 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?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

What is Jesus saying? He's saying, simply, "Bear fruit." Bear fruit, because time is short. You have opportunity. Life is short. You have one job: BEAR FRUIT. Jesus did all the work on the cross necessary for us to get to heaven –to have eternal life.

The work of salvation is a done deal for all who believe! However, as a follower of Christ, you don't just get to sit back on your laurels and take it easy. Strawberry plants bear strawberries, and apple trees bear apples. Christians bear good fruit.

Well, what kind of fruit? If you've been following along in the gospel of Luke, both John the Baptist and Jesus preached repentance. Looking at the Jews, the fruits of repentance have not been very forthcoming. Remember the gospel text from last week when Jesus lamented over Jerusalem? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I have longed to gather you as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing..." They are rejecting Him. There are pitiful little fruits of repentance to be found amongst His own people.

Produce fruit. A tree or plant uses a lot of energy to produce fruit. It's hard work. Fruit takes time. With Christians it can be the same way. First we recognize our need to repent. Then the fruit can begin and grow and mature.

In our text, the gardener decided he wanted to give the tree another chance to bear fruit. And so it is with our Lord. He is gracious and long-suffering. But these are stiff warnings from Jesus. They are warnings born out of love. Make haste; hurry up! You don't know when your last day, your last hour may be. When it's too late, it's too late.

We could say that this tree is living on borrowed time. Someone on death row has received a pardon, so-to-speak. "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sins shall die." From the time we are born, we are all living on borrowed time.

Jesus is telling these people, "Pilate didn't kill you; the wall didn't fall on you. Get busy: Repent. Bear fruit." In closing, remember that this message is for us as well. You're not dead yet. You have time, but time is short. Get busy: Repent. Bear fruit. Amen.

Heavenly father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your Son. We thank you for the time we have been given. Help us, we ask, as we go forth now, in the name of your Son Jesus, to bear those fruits worthy of repentance, and worthy of being a Christ-follower, Amen.