May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Siloam’s was not the last tower to fall and Pilate was not the last to hurt or kill another person. Tyrants and towers are a reality of this world and our lives. They come in all sorts of events, ways, and circumstances. Sometimes it’s intentional, other times it’s accidental. Sometimes it’s of human origin, other times it’s the way of nature. Accidents, disease, crime, divorce, famine, poverty, war, earthquakes, tornados, and tsunamis. Those are but a few of the tyrants and towers in this world.

Whenever and wherever tyrants act and towers fall we are faced with the reality that life is fragile, unpredictable, and often tragic. In those moments we are often quick, too quick, to seek and offer easy explanations. “They got what they deserved.” “God has a plan.” “Everything happens for a reason.” “He’s in a better place.” “There’s a lesson to be learned here.” “This was God’s will.” “Someday when we get to heaven we’ll know why.”

Jesus has heard something like these explanations from the people who tell him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. It sounds a lot like they are saying that something bad happened because they were bad people. To this kind of thinking and all the other simplistic and unhelpful responses in the face of tragedy Jesus says, “No, I tell you.”

That is not who God is or how God acts. The reality is actions and choices have natural consequences. Sometimes they are tragedy and suffering. Other times they are prosperity and joy. The reality is good things happen to both good and bad people. The reality is bad things happen to both good and bad people. Tyrants, towers, and God show no partiality. That is more than clear in Jesus’ statement, “Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

“Unless you repent….” I suspect that’s not what the people wanted or expected to hear from Jesus when they told him how Pilate killed the Galilean worshippers. I can’t imagine that Jesus’ story about the eighteen killed when the tower of Siloam fell and then his words, “Unless you repent,” made things any better.

Imagine that one day you call to tell me that you son or daughter is getting a divorce, that your best friend has just been diagnosed with cancer, that you mom has died, or your husband just lost his job. You would not be happy if my response was, “Unless you repent….” Your next phone call or visit would probably be with Bishop Susan Bell. “Can you believe what he said? How could he say that to me? What are you going to do about this?”

Let’s just be honest about this. Jesus’ words are not all that helpful. They offer no consolation, explanation, or comfort. “Unless you repent…” is not we want to hear. Sometimes, however, it is what we need to hear. Today’s gospel is not about pastoral care. Jesus, to state the obvious, is not acting as a pastor. He is being pure prophet.

Prophets speak hard truths, truths we often do not want to hear. Jesus is looking with insight into the condition of our lives, making a diagnosis, and offering a corrective. Prophetic words challenge us. Sometimes they scare us. Other times they make us feel guilty or angry. Always, they grab our attention and show the way to new life.

“*Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did*.” (Lk 13: 3.5)

Now is the time to examine the fig tree of our life. Where is our life bearing fruit? Where is it not? Where do we need to spend time, care, and energy nurturing life and relationships? What are our priorities and do they need adjusting? Who or what orients our life? Are we growing or are we “wasting the soil” in which we have been planted?

We are right to hear urgency and necessity in Jesus’ words, because life is short, precious, and sacred. Jesus is more concerned with why people do not fully live than he is with explaining why people die, tyrants act, or towers fall. Everyone dies but not all truly live.

Repentance is the way to life, the way of becoming most authentically who we are and who, at the deepest level, we long to be. Ultimately, repentance is about choosing to live and live fully.

It is never too late. “One more year,” the gardener told the owner. That is not about time but about forgiveness, grace, love, and second chances. Amen.