

Today, Tomorrow and the Day after tomorrow

Luke 13: 31-35

Last Wednesday, on February 23rd, there was a tragic accident in a middle school in Littleton, Colorado. A thirty-two-year-old man walked through a middle school parking and shot at students with a hunting rifle. Two students were wounded. Then, a mathematics teacher tackled the man and caught him. He was a hero.

Whenever this kind of tragic accident or natural disaster, like the recent earthquake in Haiti, occurs, many people ask the question, “Why do such tragic things happen to people?” “Is this God’s punishment or judgment?” In Luke chapter 13, there is a very good lesson from the Lord about such tragedies in life.

One day, some people came to Jesus and reported that the Galileans were killed by Pilate and they were offering sacrifices to God. Jesus answered them, “Because these Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? No I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did.”

Here, we have a lesson about tragedies and accidents in life. It is nothing to do with the victim’s sin. The shooter at the Littleton middle school was a man with mental problems, and that day, he took on the role of evil. The two students were not actually his targets, but they just happened to be there when a crazy man appeared. And, they were victimized by this crazy man. The mathematics teacher never expected that such an incident would take place, but he dashed into this scene of tragedy and tackled the gunman when he saw the deadly situation. The teacher was also a person who just happened to be there. Most tragedies happen like that. That is the world we live in, and evil is everywhere. That’s why the Lord taught us to pray, “Deliver us from evil.” Without prayer, we may easily fall into this pervasive evil.

Today’s scripture reading, Luke 13: 31-35, shows us the importance of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ ministry was teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, and healing people. Because the world is prevailed by vice and evil, there are many victims who are in sickness, and oppressed among the people. Everywhere Jesus went, he had been surrounded by people who wanted to hear the gospel and be healed. In Jesus’ sight, they were all like sheep, who had lost their shepherd. He poured his heart to them and touched them with healing hands.

One day, when he was so busy in his ministry, some Pharisees came to Jesus and interrupted him, saying, “You must get out of here and go somewhere else, because Herod wants to kill you!” In other words, “you are in a very dangerous situation, so escape here now.” Jesus replied them, “Go tell the fox: ‘I am driving out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I shall finish my work.’ Yet, I must be on my way today, tomorrow, and the next day. I will not leave Jerusalem. It is

not right for the prophet to leave and be killed anywhere, except in Jerusalem. I am supposed to be killed in Jerusalem.”

What a hardy statement in front of the authority of the world! Imagine that a hen gathers her chicks under her wings to protect a fierce vulture that is trying to snatch her chicks. The hen might be killed by the vulture, but the hen would never give up her chicks. The hen’s sacrificing love for her chicks is mightier than the claws of the vulture.

This declaration of Jesus awakens us to valuable lessons for life. First, we learn to affirm our life, not only for today, but also for tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow. Our life today is not just a link with yesterday, but also with tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

Each person brings so many things to the present moment. There are influences from out of the past – we all have our histories. There are memories and hopes, loves and hates, doubts and beliefs, joys and sorrows. We bring past successes and failures to this moment. We bring our friendships and our loves to this moment, but we also bring loneliness, and sometimes the memory of friendship and the loves which no longer are ours. We call these memories history, which means they no longer exist today. All those things belong to yesterday. Yesterday has been lived. We may forget yesterday’s things.

The most important question about any human being is not, “Where have you been?” but “In what direction are you going?” According to Christian understanding, we begin the journey of human life as infantile creatures – centered in self. If a newborn infant could speak adult words, he would say, “Give me what I want. I am the whole center of my universe.” That is fine for an infant. But, if one gets to be eighteen years of age, or forty-eight or eighty-eight, and has nothing more to say than, “Give me what I want. I am the center of everything,” he is in deep trouble. Life is designed for growth, moving into larger worlds of meaning and service, becoming centers of freedom and love.

The Apostle Paul declared, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” Abandon, discard and forget the past life! Walk a new walk today.

Jesus said, even though he was threatened and told to leave by the power of this world, he didn’t bend his will and mind and heart. This is the spirit of Jesus, who would die for the sake of the people, save their lives and redeem their sins. Christian love is not in one’s head, but in one’s heart and hands.

The great artist, Rembrandt, did a fascinating thing in one of his paintings. Instead of painting a halo over the head of Jesus in one work of an art, he painted a halo around his hands. Not over his head, but around his hands! Why? Over the years, critics have debated why Rembrandt did this. It seems to me that he was reminding us of all the ways Christ used his hands: he healed the sick, fed the hungry, blessed the children, and raised the dead. With his hands, he showed us how to live faith and how to put our faith to

work. With the sacred touch of his hands, he gives us a self we can live with, and a faith we can live by.

Remember that today's life is not dependent on safe and security, but on the meaning of life. Today is the first day of the rest of your life! Yesterday has been lived. Tomorrow is still unborn. But today is now ours. What meaning can today – yes, this very hour – have for us? Perhaps it could mark the taking of some first step into a new life. Perhaps it could mark the taking of some renewed step in a life we have recently entered. In any event, let not this day – this hour – pass without meaning.

I started ministry at the age of twenty-five. That was pretty young, wasn't it? The church I first served was a small church in a rural area. It was fifty miles away from the nearest city. It took three hours by train if I wanted to go to Seoul, the capital city of Korea. Once a week, I would go to Seoul to attend graduate school classes, from Monday to Wednesday, while I was in ministry at the church.

One day, I took a train at seven o'clock in the evening from Seoul to head back home. It would be almost ten o'clock when I got off the train, which meant that I still had about a thirty minute walk back home, where Sun was waiting for me. I was a little bit tired, and sitting on the train, I closed my eyes, until I heard a noise of falling metal from a shelf, and a woman's crying. I noticed a woman, about mid-fifties, crying and a man shouting at her, "I told you not to sell anything!" He overturned a bowl, a metal container, which was half-full of home-made rice cakes.

It was forbidden to sell anything on the train, unless given permission by the authority of the transportation department. She was a private seller of a home-made rice cakes in a train. The man who upset the woman's rice cake container was a rival seller, and he had a permit to sell. I felt compassion for her, who looked very poor and was trying to live and support her family in this late hour. No matter what the legal status of her lack of permit, she should not be treated liked that. I approached her and gave her some money from my wallet, and I felt it was not enough to help her. At that time, a train attendant was passing to check tickets. I stopped him and told him that there was a violent incident on this train. I took out a pocket notebook and asked him what is his badge number was, and I wrote it down. I told him, "You are responsible for this incident, so I demand that you bring that man to me, who was violent on this train." Then, he told me that he would, and went to look for that guy.

I didn't know why I demanded his presence, but it was too late to say forget it. My heart was trembling. I was so mad at the violence. About five minutes later, the train attendant brought a guy who looked wild and tough, a strong man. What should I do? Should I fight with him? As you see, I am not now, and was not that strong a man then. If the man wanted a confrontation, saying, "Who are you, making trouble with me? Do you want me to fight with you?" What could I do? I prayed that God help me to figure out what to do, and what to say. Anyway, I had to stand and confront him. A man approached me from behind saying, "Gentleman, you may go to your seat," showing the badge of a sheriff. "I can take care of that. I know what happened." God sent me a helper.

Why should we have courage to challenge life, even though we are facing threat? Because, we have a third day, the day after tomorrow, the final triumph.

The Apostle Paul introduces us to three virtues of Christian affirmation in Christ: Faith, Hope, and Love. Hope is the owner of the future. Love is the owner of the present. But, Faith is the owner of the day after tomorrow, the final triumph.

Everybody needs hope, without hope nobody can really live. Despair is the enemy of hope. Despair is the disease unto death. Even if we are living in poverty, trouble, or in sickness, if we can have hope, we can endure any difficulty we have. But, the hope that this world can offer is limited. Tomorrow is limited. But, there is the day after tomorrow, which, to us Christians symbolizes triumph, the resurrection of the Christ. Jesus told them, "I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I will reach my goal." In this, he implies the third day, the day of victory, overcoming the death, the resurrection.

Jesus told us through the parable of the Good Samaritan that there are three kinds of hearts in the world: a cold heart, a calculating heart, and a compassionate heart.

A man is beaten and robbed, and left seriously injured on the roadside by the robbers, the thieves, and the bandits. They are the cold-hearted people. They are cold-hearted takers, grabbers, and robbers.

Then, there are other people like the priest and the Levite, who see the injured man. They don't want to get involved, so they nervously tiptoe by on the other side. These are the people who approach life with a "calculating heart."

Then, there is the Samaritan – the Good Samaritan. He is good because he is compassionate. He is a giver. His approach to life is to do something good and helpful; to do something productive and creative; to do loving action; to bring healing where there is hurt; to go through life with a caring, compassionate heart.

These three approaches are possibilities for us. Which type of person are you? Which do you want to be? Which will you be today and tomorrow and the rest of your life? Those who have passion to live in their heart are happy. But those who have compassion on people are blessed, because they have the heart of Jesus. Their lives belong to the third day of the Lord.