



## Why Sheep Are Easier than Fig Trees

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 20, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I have been a pastor long enough to gather a list of my favorite pet peeves in ministry. You know those things that you find particularly annoying. Well, I have a list of pet peeves that are under the title of “Christian’s Main Pet Peeves” and a second list that falls under “Pastor Chris’ Favorite Pet Peeves.” My wife would tell you that the older I get – the similar those lists are beginning to look, but there are some uniquely Pastor Chris Pet Peeves. If you have or have had or will have a child in JOLT – our junior high ministry – you have probably heard that Pastor Chris announces two pet peeves at the beginning of the year. They are so well-known, that other students often share them for me. First, your phone goes away once we start JOLT. And second, don’t talk when we are praying. Obvious to a point.... but over the years I have watched the expectations we have for ourselves and for others move lower and lower – almost to the place where any expectations at all are too much to expect. If we take one step out of JOLT into the broader church – well...Pet Peeve #3 - don’t call yourself an active member of a church if you only show up once a year. Talk about a low expectation. Mercy, is it hot in here? Pet Peeve #2 – Please do not expect that at the end of an event someone else will clean it up. I mean, seriously, I am one of the best paid custodian/dishwashers in the state of Wisconsin. Pet Peeve #1 – anyone know it already? I have shared this one several times. Please do not show up at a funeral and tell the family of the person in the casket, “everything happens for a reason.” This also applies to every job loss, cancer diagnosis, addiction, mental health challenge, divorce, car accident, loss of a child, natural disaster, terrorist attack, pandemic, miscarriage, and any other life event we cannot adequately explain to justify what has happened.

If ever there was a sermon where you would hear the words “everything happens for a reason.” This is the sermon. And hopefully, you know me well enough by now, to know, I have never, would never, use those words for anything other than a sarcastic punchline. If you are hopeful today, that your presence in church will answer all the unanswerable questions in your life – you have come to the wrong place. Even the disciples are struggling today.

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you



## Why Sheep Are Easier than Fig Trees

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 20, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

will all perish just as they did.” Here is what I love – Jesus, had his own “everything happens for a reason” moment with the disciples. The disciples heard the story of the Galileans that Pilate had murdered while they were worshipping and giving their offerings. To add insult to injury – Pilate ordered that the blood of the Galileans be added to the animals being scarified which made their offerings to God invalid. The disciples want to know if it is the sin of the Galileans that caused such a tragedy. And although Jesus is quick to offer an emphatic “no” to their question, they continue. “Well how about the 18 who lost their lives when the tower of Siloam fell on them and killed them? Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?” Come on Jesus, just let us know that the ones who died when the tower fell on them were bad people – never went to church – ignored the poor – took their loved ones for granted – skipped out on praying to God unless they needed something from God - pretended injustice did not exist – thought they heard someone else had volunteered to clean-up...and we will keep living our pure, righteous lives following you – for the most part.

Again, Jesus offers a forceful and definite “no” to their question. As if to tell us, “No, not everything happens for a reason. Sometimes there are simply tragedies, accidents, senseless moments of anguish.” It is not for someone’s sin that they are being punished. Could it be that someone’s tragedy is no punishment at all? But instead, a suffering that must be met with defiance so that we might remember that God is present with us so that we might be present with others. Not everything that happens consents to an explanation – at least in this life. Facing the reality of mystery and the limits of what we can know is not an excuse to stand still. Jesus is on a mission. Those who would be disciples of Jesus, who would follow in his way in the power of his Spirit, are on that mission. Much is unknown. Many questions will remain unanswered. In the end, the future is God’s, but we share in the mission of unfolding the future.

It is why, I believe, we are left with the parable of the fig tree to help us move forward regardless of the questions we cannot answer. "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.'" I learned a few years ago that fig trees do not produce fruit for at least the first three years they are in the ground. And some take as long as six years for their first fruit. Some produce fruit too early and that fruit will never ripen. Other trees may produce fruit more than once a year.



## Why Sheep Are Easier than Fig Trees

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 20, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

The man is impatient. People, I am that man. This owner of the vineyard is like my idol for all the things I believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to do at Ascension and wherever else God is leading us to serve. I am impatient waiting for blossoms to produce fruit. If it were up to me, that fig tree would have landed in the burn pile a long time ago. My wife would have been mad, and I would have bought a new fig tree and started all over with the waiting. Good thing I am not the gardener nor the owner of the vineyard. In fact, according to my wife it is better if I stay out of the vineyard altogether. “Go be a shepherd,” she tells me. “I will take care of the gardening.” So be it! Sheep are way easier than fig trees anyways.

I have one more pet peeve to share. Sermons that do not tie up nicely at the end. I know, sometimes it is good to leave the faithful with a question – something to wrestle with in the days ahead. But today, I want – I need to leave you with a clean finish.

Every-so-often I play a game with students and adults called two truths and a lie. The idea is you to try and trick the group by getting them to name the lie you told about yourself as one of your truths. Well today, I am giving you one lie and two truths.

Everything happens for a reason. LIE.

God does not punish you for your behavior. TRUE.

God loves you more than you can imagine. TRUE.

Thanks be to God. Amen.