

What's in Your Dash?
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Luke 13:1-9

In our lesson for today, Luke tells a parable and a story about current events, listen for and hear God's word to us in this passage.

Luke 13:1-9

How often do we read an obituary in the paper and are surprised at the age of the deceased? Or, how often do we read in the newspaper or listen to a news story about an accident or a catastrophe such as an earthquake, and think, what a waste of a life?

In our lesson today, one of the current events, is that a tower fell; and 18 people were killed. The disciples and those people who were gathered wondered where God was when this happened. Did the people deserve to die? How could God have let something like that happen?

Don't we ask ourselves those kinds of questions all the time? This past month alone, there have been major earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, and minor ones elsewhere. Don't we wonder, why them and not us?

When we are thinking with our rational minds, we know that God was not responsible for the earthquakes. They were caused by the plates of the earth shifting—just like they've always done since the earth began. It is a normal displacement of energy as the giant plates either cooled or expanded, causing them to redistribute their weight in a different way. Earthquakes, today, can be explained by science. But many still hold on to the questions from an earlier age—where was God when all this happened?

One of the commentators says: "Accidents happen, disasters happen, humans decide to do violent acts against other humans, and sometimes people are in the wrong place at the wrong time. We didn't deserve any more than anyone else to have a pane of glass fall out of a window and onto our head, but are we ready if it does happen?"

When we're reading obituaries, one of the first things that we see is the date of birth, then a dash, then the date of death. Then the obituary does on to tell us a little bit about the person's life—all the things that fill in the dash. No one knows how much time we have on the earth, whether we live as long as our ancestors, or if some accident or illness will shorten our time. We might guess that good genes, modern medicine, and healthy habits might lengthen that time. But we don't really know. What we need to do, is make the best of each day as it comes.

"There is a poem that often gets read at funerals that gives a little insight into the concept Jesus is teaching. It is called, *The Dash* by Linda Ellis.

I read of a man who stood to speak

At the funeral of a friend
He referred to the date on her tombstone
From the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came her date of birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years
(1934-1998).

For that dash represents all the time
That she spent alive on earth...
And now only those who loved her
Know what that little line is worth

For it matters not, how much we own;
The cars...the house...the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard...
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left,
That can still be rearranged.

If we could slow down enough
To consider what's true and real,
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger.
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect,
And more often wear a smile,
Remembering that this little dash
Might only last a while

So when your eulogy's being read
With your life's actions to rehash...
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent your dash?

(from the website www.thedashmovie.com poem can be downloaded free and used as a visual in worship)

As Christians, we know that God cares about how we spend our dash. God calls us into relationship and urges us to live lives worthy of the calling to be Christ's disciples, to be God's hands and feet here on earth.

In the parable, the tree was given one more year to produce. Are there areas of our lives, that, if given more attention and care, could be more productive? Are there things or relationships that are withering? Are there things we're overlooked for far too long? Are there things we can do today to add meaning to our lives?

Lent is a time for reflection—a time to reflect on our lives, on our relationships, and on our discipleship. When our days on earth are done, and we stand before the throne of God, will we be satisfied with the lives we've led—how we've spent our dash?

Thanks be to God. Amen.