

**MARCH 23, 2025**  
**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT "CUT  
DOWN"**

**LUKE 13:1-9**



**ST. JOHN UNITED  
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(NCH) New Century Hymnal -  
CCLI LICENSE #11164431  
\*Please stand if comfortably able.  
Respond with words in bold print.  
*Ushers –*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER  
CONCERNS**

**A PRAYER FOR OUR TIME**

**THE BELL IS RUNG**

**PRELUDE: Trumpet Concerto by Johann  
Hummel Aaron Eisenhauer on trumpet  
accompanied by Nancy Eisenhauer**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION: One Great Hour of  
Sharing**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: You who are thirsty:

**People: Come to receive living water.**

L: You who are hungry:

**P: Taste the bread that satisfies.**

L: You who long for connection:

**P: Receive the fellowship of this  
community, and the fellowship of the Holy  
Spirit.**

L: You who search for love:

**P: Experience the love of Jesus expressed  
in music, prayer, community, word and  
action.**

L: May this time of worship fill and refresh  
you.

**P: Let us worship God together!**

**\*INVOCATION**

Holy One, draw us into community and  
connection. Let us receive you and our  
companions in worship. Keep us open to  
the unexpected, so that we may perceive  
your work in the world, and your work in us.  
Amen.

**\*OPENING HYMN: 252 "Savior, Like a  
Shepherd Lead Us"**

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION  
AND NEW LIFE**

**Gracious God, sometimes we are  
disappointed by other people, too ready to  
dismiss or discard them. Help us to see in  
others what you see in them: their growth,  
the fruits that they offer. Forgive us when  
we too quickly judge others. Forgive us  
also, when we doubt that we can be**

**worthy followers of you. May we be inspired to nurture your people and ourselves. Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE**

God's ways are not our ways. Where we would condemn ourselves or others, God forgives. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

**\*GLORIA**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)  
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON Isaiah 55:1-9**

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water!

Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat!

Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk!

<sup>2</sup> Why spend money for what isn't food, and your earnings for what doesn't satisfy?

Listen carefully to me and eat what is good; enjoy the richest of feasts.

<sup>3</sup> Listen and come to me; listen, and you will live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful loyalty to David.

<sup>4</sup> Look, I made him a witness to the peoples, a prince and commander of peoples.

<sup>5</sup> Look, you will call a nation you don't know, a nation you don't know will run to you

because of the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, who has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord when he can still be found; call him while he is yet near.

<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked abandon their ways and the sinful their schemes.

Let them return to the Lord so that he may have mercy on them,

to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness.

<sup>8</sup> My plans aren't your plans, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans than your plans.

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 63:1-8 Page 660**

**EPISTLE 1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

**Warning from the wilderness generation**

10 Brothers and sisters, I want you to be sure of the fact that our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all went through the sea. <sup>2</sup> All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> All ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> However, God was unhappy with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> These things were examples for us, so we won't crave evil things like they did. <sup>7</sup> Don't worship false gods like some of them did, as it is written, *The people sat down to eat and drink and they got up to play.*<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>8</sup> Let's not practice sexual immorality, like some of

them did, and twenty-three thousand died in one day. <sup>9</sup> Let's not test Christ, like some of them did, and were killed by the snakes. <sup>10</sup> Let's not grumble, like some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as an example and were written as a warning for us to whom the end of time has come. <sup>12</sup> So those who think they are standing need to watch out or else they may fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

**\*GOSPEL LESSON Luke 13:1-9**

**Demand for genuine change**

13 Some who were present on that occasion told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He replied, "Do you think the suffering of these Galileans proves that they were more sinful than all the other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did. <sup>4</sup> What about those eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them? Do you think that they were more guilty of wrongdoing than everyone else who lives in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did." <sup>6</sup> Jesus told this parable: "A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> He said to his gardener, 'Look, I've come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I've never

found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil's nutrients?' <sup>8</sup> The gardener responded, 'Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. <sup>9</sup> Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

*These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.*

*Thanks be to God.*

**MESSAGE:** At the heart of today's First Testament reading is God's call for sinners to forsake the ways of evil and turn to the Lord, fully assured that God's pardon is freely available. With its emphasis on complete confidence and trust in God, Psalm 63 forms a fitting response. In the epistolary text, Paul recalls Israel's experience in the wilderness as a caution against false confidence and a reminder to flee the sins of idolatry and self-indulgence. In the Gospel text we have an urgent call to repentance, one of the most compelling in the New Testament.

One could hardly find a gospel lection more appropriately Lenten or more characteristically of the Gospel of Luke than our text today. The entire passage is an urgent call to repentance, a turning from sin and a reformation of action and attitude. The theme of repentance occurs more in Luke than in other New Testament writers. In fact, the Gospel for Luke is the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins as we can read in Chapter 24. Also typically Lukan is the parable of the fig tree with its accent on the appeal for mercy that holds off the hand of judgment. This passage consists of two statements by Jesus

that serve as an introduction to and commentary on a parable about a barren fig tree. In form, the two sayings are exactly parallel, each ending with the pronouncements, “but unless you repent, you will all perish.” But the differences in the two sayings combine to make them inclusive in their application. The first has to do with Galileans, the second with the People who live in Jerusalem. Jesus is speaking to all. The first has to do with tragedy caused by a human being, the second with tragedy caused by natural calamity. Jesus is including all the violence and suffering that strikes without reason or meaning.

The question, Why this to these particularly people? Is as old as the human race. The disciples asked Jesus. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The question assumed that there was direct correlation between sin and suffering. To those disciples and in today’s lection Jesus **denied** that direct correlation. But still the idea persists: illness, poverty, disease, loneliness, and death are the punishment for sins known or unknown. I’m sure we have all heard this.

For Christians, the fatal blow to the idea that suffering and death are the consequence of the guilty people who came at Golgotha. The One without sin suffered and died on the cross; some present took that as proof he was not the Son of God. But Jesus’ disciples are forever freed from the ancient notion that prosperity and good health are evidence of divine favor, whereas poverty and suffering are clear signs of divine wrath.

Jesus rejects such attempts at calculation, not simply because they are futile, but because they direct attention from the primary issue – the obligation of every person to live in penitence and trust before God without linking one’s loyalty to God to life’s sorrow or joys. ALL ARE THE REPENT OR PERISH.

Luke’s story leaves open the possibility of fruitfulness, and at least a temporary triumph of mercy over judgment. The delay of God’s judgment because of the intercession of a prophet or Moses is not uncommon in the Old Testament. In Christian circles, one explanation for the delay of the “day of the Lord” was that God, for the sake of mercy, was giving more people a chance to avoid the terror of that day. Luke’s message here is similar, there is still time for Israel to repent and to bear fruit as evidence of that repentance. In other words, God’s mercy is still talking to God’s judgment and on that conversation hangs our salvation.

THERE’S STILL TIME FOR US. AMEN.

### **SPECIAL MUSIC “Just As I Am” Flute (Stacie)/Piano (Sharon) Duet**

**PASTORAL PRAYER** *Beginning with silent personal prayer:* You are great, O God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Because of your promises, and according to your own heart, you have brought us salvation in Jesus Christ and called us as new people to share the good news with all the world. Bless and add to your church those who are coming to themselves and returning to the

home of their parents in the faith. Pour your water of life on the thirsty land, and stream so the dry ground. Pour your Spirit upon all of us as your children and give blessings to your offspring. Call your people to more constant prayer, more fervent faith, and such confidence in you that the coming of your rule may not be delayed by half-heartedness.

Bless this land we love despite its faults. Sustain our government leaders in administering just laws and governing us with wisdom and integrity.

Compassionate Christ, comfort your children who are faint from the struggle with the ailments and adversities of our mortal life; speak tenderly to those who mourn. We especially pray for all those on our prayer list, especially all those who have had procedures and surgeries this week.

God of the ages, source of all life, we thank you for sending your true and faithful servants around the world to help others in need after disasters, such as the storms we had last week and all those victims of violence in our cities and around the world.

To you, O God, we ascribe all glory and praise time without end, as we pray together the prayer your Son taught us. . .

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

#### **PRAYER RESPONSE 773 "Remember Me"**

#### **INVITATION TO GENEROSITY**

From the abundance that God has given us, let us return a portion to be used for God's work through this church.

#### **OFFERTORY "O How He Loves You and Me" Kurt Kaiser**

#### **\*DOXOLOGY 785 "We Give You but your Own"**

**We give you but your own,  
whate'er the gift may be;  
All that we have is yours alone,  
we give it gratefully.**

#### **\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION**

Dear God, take these offerings of treasure, and our lives, to use for your purposes in the world.

#### **\*CLOSING HYMN: 23 "There's a Wideness in God's mercy"**

#### **\*BENEDICTION**

Seek God, who is near. Be ready to hear God's word and live, May you trust in the mercy of God, and the blessings of God, today and always.

#### **\*BENEDICTION RESPONSE "Let there be Peace on Earth"**

#### **THE BELL IS RUNG**

#### **POSTLUDE "Paeon" George Blake**

**PRAYER LIST:** Dorothy Ovelgoenner, Mary Lou Baum, Ronald Bopp, Jackie Canterbury, Don Mueller, Marilyn Paul, Syd Safriet, Nancy Weber, Yvonne Weber, Pam Safriet