

*“Or those eighteen who were killed with the tower of Siloam fell on them—**do you think they were worse** offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”*
--Jesus (Gospel of Luke 13:4-5)

The early-morning flash flood on the Guadalupe River in southwest Texas that took the lives of over one hundred people (with perhaps one hundred more still missing) is the kind of disaster that seems unthinkable. How can a river rise so quickly? How did these people not recognize the danger? Could this much death and disaster have been prevented?

The impulse to cast blame arises quickly, but committing oneself to wisdom is a substantially slower—and more difficult—task. Disasters are nothing new, whether they’re caused by natural forces like storms and earthquakes or otherwise caused by humans.

Plenty of disasters happened in Jesus’s time, and he referenced a couple of these in Luke’s Gospel as part of a sermon about repenting and getting one’s life in order. People who die because of disasters are not outside of God’s love; they didn’t die because they were judged unworthy of life. They simply died unexpectedly.

Jesus preaches that disasters happen. We can mourn the loss of life, acknowledge our own mortality, and choose to live with intention—this is what he means by “repent.” We also have the choice to carry on our lives in ignorance, casting blame and pretending as if we’ll never die—this is what Jesus means by “you will all perish just as they did.” You can live as if you’re ready to die, or you can let death take you by surprise and be unprepared; that’s your choice.

As followers of Jesus, whose resurrection announces victory over death, we don’t view death as a defeat, but we do take human life seriously: our own lives and the lives of our neighbors too. This is why it’s important to take time in prayer, in conversation with God, to prepare our own hearts for life and death, and it’s also important to look for ways to improve our neighbor’s life, whether helping someone dig through the rubble of their home after a tornado or advocating for people’s access to healthcare.

It’s also wise to be prepared for natural disasters, and the ELCA’s Lutheran Disaster Response has some terrific resources. Check it out:
<https://www.elca.org/our-work/relief-and-development/lutheran-disaster-response/frequently-asked-questions> Lutherans are known for their patience and persistence in caring for people after disasters—we stick around until the end, a powerful statement of presence because that’s how we understand God, whose

love and presence are with us always. God's kin-dom moves toward the healing of all creation.

Pastor Cheryl Walenta Gorvie