

(Second Sunday in Lent, 4th March 2007, Rev. Rob Lamerton at St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor, ACT)

Before there was Thorpey the swimmer, there was Thorpey the singer.

Billy Thorpe, who died the other day, was one of pop idols of my day and his sudden death at 60 is a reminder of just how vulnerable we are, just how fragile life is!

Indulge me for a moment, as I recall Thorpey the singer. He had hits with songs that had such deep and meaningful titles as “Mashed potato . . . Yeah!” I really loved his versions of “Poison ivy” and “Over the rainbow”, but then he went away and reinvented himself. He returned to play the loudest concert I have ever heard with “Most people I know think that I’m crazy” — still one of the best Australian pop songs! Sadly, I do not have it here to play for you today!

Although his death was from natural causes, its suddenness has us saying “How fortunate that it was quick,” but also “How sad”.

The suddenness connects with the suddenness of the tragic stories Jesus recalls in his discussion with the crowds in today's gospel. This story is part of a longer series of parables and teachings by Jesus, and they all seem to have the general theme of being ready for God's judgment.

It's in this context, the people tell Jesus about some sad and tragic events that happened to some Galileans at the hands of Herod. Galileans were notably fiery, feisty, people and the source of great difficulty to the Roman authorities. There was a time when Pilate had people killed in the Temple and their blood had been mingled with that of their sacrifices. The point being made by recalling this event was to say to Jesus when he spoke about judgment, “Yes we know that these Galileans were under God's judgment.” Galileans were looked down upon, and the people were saying, “we know they are low-grade people -- but that was God's judgment.”

But no! Jesus asks instead, “Were they, the people who were killed, worse sinners than any other Galileans? Why did God not deal with all Galilee in the same way?” Jesus recalls the eighteen who were killed by the tower of Siloam when it fell. “Were they any worse than others in Jerusalem?” Surely not!

Disaster in Jesus' day was seen as punishment for sin, and people *still* seem to think of it that way. We heard some interpret the tsunami that way . . . and even the recent storms in Canberra.

But no! These are random events, some caused by hunger for power (as in the case of Pilate's killing of the Galileans), some caused by weaknesses in a building, and some that were simply natural occurrences. Jesus draws from these events the need for ALL to repent or perish.

But then he seems to draw back from that extreme view by telling the story of the unfruitful fig tree — no fruit for three years! Jesus tells about the reprieve of the tree, for another year. But as well it will be dug around and the soil enriched. Give it another chance — but also give it some help.

Preceding this story, the message is one of judgment. Now, repentance is necessary to all; but the gardener (God) gives another chance. Then there are stories about the kingdom of God.

No, disastrous events are not God's judgment — they are disastrous events! Repentance and openness to God, which is the theme of Lent, brings us face-to-face with the God who gives a second chance!

We hear Abram's story the promise of descendants and land, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. (We immediately think of the people of Israel inheriting this land as the children of Abram, but Abram is also the father of the Arab peoples.)

In Abraham, God intervenes to create a people for himself, the fulfilment of which, as St. Paul points out, we find in Christ and the new people of God.

Down through the generations, God's people journey towards a promised land that is also discerned by St. Paul to mean no longer land, but our place in heaven. Repentance is always part of that journey.

Time and time again, we turn back to God from our failures, sins and weaknesses, from our injustice selfishness, etc. I have no difficulty with making one's confession time and time again, because we usually make the same mistakes over and over. Repentance readies us for the kingdom!

Those of us who are old enough to remember the *Book of Common Prayer* will recall this response from the Litany:

“From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder . . . and from sudden death, *Good Lord, deliver us.*”

I'll be grateful to go suddenly, like Billy Thorpe. But I trust I will be prepared.

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Most people I know, by Billy Thorpe

*Most people I know think that I'm crazy and  
I know at times I act a little hazy but  
if that's my way  
and you should know it then  
in every way help me to show it.*

*ooooooooo yeah, yeah, yeah*

*For most of my life I lived a delusion yes  
material gain has caused me confusion but  
slowly in time I learned that my place is to  
tell all that I meet the glory that God is*

*ooooooooo yeah, yeah*

*and that's why,*

*most people i know think that I'm crazy and  
I know at times I act a little hazy, but*

*if that's my way  
and you should know it, then  
in every way help me to show it.*