

RELIGION

PASTOR'S COLUMN



TRACY BAUGH

CALVARY CHAPEL, NEW LIFE, SPENCER

When tragedy strikes, what does God say?

Every time we turn on the news, we’re faced with headlines that shake us: the assassination of Charlie Kirk, and on the same day, a tragic shooting occurred at a public school in Jefferson County, Colorado. This came only a month after a shooting at a private Christian school in Minneapolis, and earlier this year, flooding at a Christian youth camp in Texas that swept away

young lives. Each of these headlines reminds us of the same question people have wrestled with for centuries: Why do bad things happen to good people?

The question isn’t new. In fact, Jesus addressed it directly in Luke 13:1-9. When people told Him about Galileans who, while they were offering their sacrifices at the Temple, had been slaughtered by Pilate, or about 18 others who died when a tower fell on them, His response was striking.

Jesus’ response may surprise us. He didn’t enter into a philosophical debate. He didn’t lay out a defense of God’s goodness. Instead, He said: “Do you suppose that these were worse sinners than all others? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Here, Jesus gives us perspective. The real question is not why bad things happen to good people, but whether there are truly any good people at all. According to Scripture, there are not.

In other words, tragedies are not a measuring stick of someone else’s sin. Instead, they are reminders of our own need to repent before God. Suffering and death in this world are evidence of the fall — that humanity is separated from God and living under the curse of sin. No one is truly “innocent.” The Bible teaches, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and

“There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

We are not innocent victims — we are sinners in need of God’s mercy. Yet tragically, even many in the church today are confused about this. Ligonier Ministries’ 2025 “State of Theology” survey found that over 60% of self-identified evangelical Christians said they believe everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God, and 53% said most people are good by nature.

These are not harmless errors — they are lies that blunt the edge of the gospel. If man is innocent, Christ’s death is unnecessary. If people are good, the cross is meaningless.

The truth is sharper. We are not innocent. We are not good. And apart from repentance, we will perish.

Job reminds us that even the righteous may suffer, not as punishment but within God’s purposes. Abraham’s intercession for Sodom shows the gravity of sin and the scarcity of righteousness. Abraham pleaded with God to spare the city if even ten righteous people could be found. But the reality is that even if the number had been reduced to one, humanity’s sinfulness would still have justified judgment. Every one of us stands guilty before a holy God, and only Christ’s sacrifice can save us. Apart from God’s grace, we are all without hope.

That is why Jesus pressed the point: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” These words are sobering. But He immediately followed them with a parable about a barren fig tree. For three years, the tree bore no fruit. The owner wanted to cut it down, but the vine dresser pleaded for more time: “Let me dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit, good. But if not, then cut it down.”

This parable teaches us two things: first, that God is patient and merciful, giving people time to repent. Second, that patience is not endless — God expects fruit. Repentance must result in a changed life, bearing fruit consistent with His Kingdom.

Jesus told a similar story about talents entrusted to servants. Two invested what they were given and produced more. One buried his talent in the ground, doing nothing with it. The master called him “wicked and lazy” and cast him out. The message is unmistakable: we are accountable for what we do with the life and opportunities

God gives us.

Which brings me back to the life of Charlie Kirk. Whether you agreed with his politics or not, there is no denying the impact of his short life. In just 31 years, he produced more lasting fruit than many who live twice as long. He poured himself out through his speaking, writing, and advocacy. His voice reached far beyond what most people could ever imagine. He lived, served, and bore much fruit.

His life challenges us to ask: What fruit am I producing with the time God has given me? When our time comes — whether suddenly in tragedy or quietly at the end of a long life — what fruit will we be able to offer our Lord? Jesus said in John 15:8, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

Works do not save us — only Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross can do that. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. But true salvation always bears fruit. Repentance leads to transformation. And transformation shows itself in obedience, love, and faithfulness, resulting in fruitfulness. Faith that never bears fruit is not faith at all.

Bad things happen to all people because all are sinners in a broken world. But the greater tragedy is to waste the time we are given. If your life were to end tomorrow, what fruit would you have to show? Have you spent your years in bitterness and resentment, or in loving service? Have you multiplied what God gave you, or buried it? One day, each of us will stand before God. The question then will not be, “Were you innocent?” (for none of us are), but rather, “Did you repent, and did your life bear fruit for My Kingdom?”

So while we mourn the losses we read about in the news, let’s not waste the message. Tragedies are reminders that life is short, uncertain, and fragile. One day, it will be our name in the paper, our funeral being planned, our life being summed up.

The question is: will there be fruit? Will there be evidence that we used what God entrusted to us? Or will we be like the servant who hid his talent and had nothing to show when the Master returned?

“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” These are sobering words, but they are also merciful. God is giving us time: time to repent, time to believe, time to bear fruit. The tragedy would be to waste it.

AREA CHURCH LISTINGS

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Foundation Church, Spencer
Rev. Nicholas Hanges, Senior Pastor
1410 W. 18th St.
712-262-6292
foundationspencer.com
• Sunday School K-12, 9 a.m.
• Sunday Prayer/Fellowship, 9 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.
• Kids Church Sunday, 10 a.m.
• Wednesday All Ages, 6:30 p.m.

BAPTIST

Baptist Church, Sioux Rapids
Rev. James Marshall
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

First Baptist Church, Spencer
Rev. Tim Smith
1200 Grand Ave.
712-262-1325
firstbaptistspencer.com
• Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.
• Sunday Upward Look — KICD 1240 AM, 10 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.
• Sunday AWANA, 4 p.m.
• Sunday FBC Youth Group, 6 p.m.

CALVARY CHAPEL

New Life Worship Center, Spencer
Rev. Tracy Baugh
1217 Fourth Ave. W.
712-262-3125
• Sunday Bible Church, 10 a.m.
• Wednesday Prayer, 6:30 p.m.

CATHOLIC

St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, Hartley
Rev. Kevin Richter
260 N. Fourth Ave. W.
712-928-2626
• Primghar St. Athony, Sunday, 8 a.m.
• Hartley St. Joseph, Sunday, 9:30 a.m.

St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, Milford
Rev. Brian Hughes
1305 Okoboji Ave.
712-338-2274

Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Ruthven
Rev. Paul Kelly
1801 Rolling St.
712-852-3187

Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Spencer
Rev. Kevin Richter
1111 Fourth Ave. W.
712-262-3047

• Saturday Service, 4:30 p.m.
• Sunday Service, 11 a.m.
Livestreamed at: spencersacredheart.com/onlinemass

CHURCH OF CHRIST

Trinity United Church of Christ, Hartley
140 N. Fifth Ave.
712-728-2889

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Spencer Family Church, Spencer
Rev. Larry Neiderhiser
905 Fifth St. SW
712-262-7298
spencerfamilychurch.org
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.
• Sunday Kid’s Church, 10:30 a.m.
• Wednesday Life Group, 7 p.m.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Spencer
1701 W. 11th St.
712-262-6172
• Sunday Sacrament Meeting, 10 a.m.
• Sunday School; Primary and Youth Meetings, 11:10 a.m.
• Sunday Men’s Priesthood Meeting and Women’s Relief Society, 12:10 p.m.

CONGREGATIONAL

Grace Congregational Church, Greenville
Rev. Tonna Parsons
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.

EPISCOPAL

The Way Station, Spencer
Rev. Beth Preston
120 W. Fourth St.
712-580-5463
revbethpreston@gmail.com
• Sunday Service, 3 p.m.

St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, Spirit Lake
Rev. Carolyn Tuttle
23rd and Zenith
712-336-1117
• Sunday Mass/Eucharist, 10 a.m.

All Saints Episcopal Church, Storm Lake
Rev. Stacey Gerhart
121 W. Marina Road
712-202-6624
• Sunday Eucharist, 10 a.m.

EVANGELICAL FREE

Riverside Evangelical Free Church, Linn Grove
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

• Ignite: 6:30 p.m.
• Salt Youth: 7:15 p.m.

CrossWinds Church, Spencer
Campus Rev. Jordan Gowing
Rev. Dr. Kurt Trucksess
1900 Grand Ave, Suite A
712-584-3151
spencer@crosswinds.tv
• Sunday Worship, 8:30 a.m. and 10:15 a.m.

FIRST CHRISTIAN

First Christian Church, Spencer
(Disciples of Christ)
Pastor Interim
915 Fourth Ave. SW
712-262-2945
• Sunday Service, 9:30 a.m.
In-House and Facebook Live
• Wednesday Kids Sunday School: 4:30 p.m.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL

First Congregational Church, Peterson
712-295-7150
• Sunday Worship, 8:45 a.m.
• Sunday School, 10 a.m.

First Congregational Church, Spencer
Rev. Shazzy Britz
1212 First Ave. W.
712-262-4392
• Worship, 10:30 a.m.
Livestream on YouTube
LUTHERAN
Hope Lutheran Church, Everly
Rev. Dan Taylor
206 N. Washington St.
712-834-2767
• Sunday Worship 10 a.m.
• Sunday School and Adult Education, 9 a.m.
Services livestreamed on YouTube at “Hope Lutheran Church — Everly, IA”

Lost Island Lutheran Church, Graettinger
Rev. Peter Morlock
• Sunday Service, 8:45 a.m.
• Fellowship, 9:45 a.m.
• Sunday School, 10 a.m.

St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran, Hartley
Rev. Christopher Nitzel
60 N. Central Ave.
712-728-2711
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.
• Sunday School 10 a.m.
• Fellowship, 10:30 a.m.
• Confirmation, 11 a.m.
• Choir Practice, 11 a.m.

Harbor of Joy Lutheran Church, Milford
Rev. Tim Voth
1204 L Ave.
712-338-2355
• Sunday Fellowship,

9:30 a.m.
• Sunday School, 8:30 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

First Lutheran Church, Milford
1525 Three Cross Road
Rev. Perry Aalgard, Senior Pastor
Rev. Brian Jack, Associate Pastor
712-338-4514
3cross.org
• Sunday Worship, 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.
• Sunday Fellowship, 9:30 a.m.
• Education/Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Royal
Rev. Dr. Mark F. Wilms
207 Church St.
712-933-2229
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

Zion Lutheran Church, Ruthven
Rev. Eric Patten
• Sunday Service, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday Fellowship, 10:30 a.m.

First Lutheran Church, Sioux Rapids
Rev. Tonna Parsons
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

Bethany Lutheran Church-ELCA, Spencer
15 W. 14th St.
712-262-2327
bethluthspencer.com
• Worship, 9 a.m.

Christ the King Lutheran Church, Spencer
Rev. Michael McGinley
500 Fourth Ave. SW
712-262-2244
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.
• Bible Study and Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.
• Services on Facebook, 9 a.m.
Podcast” released Sundays

Faith Lutheran Church, Spencer
Rev. Ben Unseth
2912 Highway Blvd.
712-580-4316
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.
• Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.
Services are streamed on YouTube
flcspencer.org

First English Lutheran Church, Spencer
Rev. Paul Kaldahl
1311 E. 18th St.
712-262-5598
spencer-church.com
• Divine Worship, also broadcast on 1240 AM and 102.5 FM, 8 a.m.
• Fellowship, 9 a.m.
• Child care in the nursery, 9:15 a.m. to Noon

• Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.
• Bible Class, 9:40 a.m.
• Divine Worship, 10:45 a.m.
• Communion on first and third Sundays.
Services & Bible Class livestreamed via website

Riverview Terrace Chapel, Spencer

1501 St. Luke Drive
712-262-5932
• Sunday Worship, 10:45 a.m.
St. Luke Home and Services, Spencer
Rev. Perry DeGroot
1301 St. Luke Drive
712-262-5931
• St. Luke Lutheran Home Worship, 10 a.m.
• Riverview Terrace Worship, 10:45 a.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Spencer
Rev. Renae Behrends
900 11th Ave. W.
712-262-1287
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

NONDENOMINATIONAL

Faith Community Church, Milford
805 Okoboji Ave.
Rev. Jennifer Hesebeck
faithcommunitymilford.com
fcc@milfordcomm.net
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.

The New Light of the Lakes Friends Church, Okoboji
• Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday Service, 10:30 a.m.
• Group Bible Study, 5 p.m.

Living Word Outreach Ministries, Spencer

Rev. Barb Dean, Lead Pastor
Rev. Mark Feauto, Associate Pastor
905 10th Ave SE
712-262-9545
livingwordspencer.org
• Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.
• Livestream id also available on the website, Facebook and YouTube.

River’s Edge Church, Spencer
Rev. Tim B. Frasher
Pastor Joseph Leggett
701 E. 18th St.
712-580-3013
• Sunday School, 9 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.

Spirit Life Fellowship, Spirit Lake
Rev. Eric Holdeman
2504 Enterprise Ave.
712-336-0114
• Sunday School, 9 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.

Maple Grove Church of God, Sutherland
Rev. Michael Hyde
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday Fellowship, 10:30 a.m.
• Sunday School, 11 a.m.

PENTECOSTAL

Faith Pentecostal Church, Spencer
1700 11th Ave. SW
712-262-3368
fpcspencer.com
Rev. Brad Wallace
Rev. Dale Hodges
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.
• Wednesday Bible Study, 6:30 p.m.

REFORMED

Good News Community Church, Okoboji
Rev. Brandon Morrow
1010 Julia St.
712-332-5698
• Sunday Worship Services, 9 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.
• Fellowship. 10:15 a.m.

Hope Church, Spencer
Pastor James Runcorn
919 Grand Ave.
712-262-3016
• Sunday Worship, 8:30 a.m., 10:45 a.m.
• Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Seventh Day Adventist Church, Spencer
1910 10th Ave. E.
712-262-5766
• Saturday Sabbath School, 9:45 a.m.
• Saturday Worship, 11 a.m.

UNITED METHODIST

Calvary United Methodist Church, Arnolds Park
Rev. Chris St. Clair
209 N. Okoboji Grove Road
712-332-2447
• Saturday Worship, 6 p.m.
• Sunday Lakeshore Worship, 7:30 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

Dickens United Methodist Church, Dickens
Rev. Donna Gray
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

United Methodist Church, Everly
Rev. Michael Eeten
301 N. Ochededan
712-834-2501
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

Community United Methodist Church, Gillett Grove
Rev. Donna Gray
• Sunday Worship, 10:15 a.m.

United Methodist Church, Hartley
361 Eighth Ave.
712-928-2649
• Sunday Church School/Confirmation Classes, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday Worship Service, 10:30 a.m.

United Methodist Church, Langdon
Rev. Chris St. Clair
• Sunday-in-house and Facebook Live Worship, 11 a.m.

First United Church, Sioux Rapids
Rev. Dr. Mike Currier
Rev. Karen Currier
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.
Church of Christ, Spencer
Contact Jeff Cookinham
1304 St. Luke Drive
712-262-2294
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.
• Sunday Bible Study, 11:15 a.m.

First United Methodist Church, Peterson
Rev. Tyler Thomsen
103 E. Third St.
• Sunday Worship, 9:15 a.m.
• Sunday Fellowship, 10:15 a.m.
• Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

First United Methodist Church, Royal
Rev. John Battern
408 Church St.
712-933-2489
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

United Methodist Church, Ruthven
Rev. Kathy Kluis
• Sunday Worship, 9 a.m.

First United Church, Sioux Rapids
• Sunday Worship, 10 a.m.

Grace United Methodist Church, Spencer
Rev. Michael Slininger
311 Second Ave. W.
712-262-5970
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.

Zion United Methodist Church, Spencer
Rev. Michael Eeten
• Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.
• Sunday Worship, 10:45 a.m.

United Methodist Church, Terril
Rev. Terry Luiken
302 S. State St.
712-853-6549
• Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m.

Trinity United Methodist Church, Webb
Rev. Kari A. Etherington
• Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m.
• Fellowship, 10:30 a.m.

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