

20 March 2022, The Third Sunday of Lent: Luke 13:1-9

Time is precious; indeed, time is the one non-renewable, irreplaceable resource we have. 'Wasting time,' let alone 'killing time,' could be viewed as a sin. The past is frozen and cannot be changed, although our attitude toward the past may. The future has not yet happened; at best we only anticipate what may or may not come. All we really have is today, the present. And it is in the present that God desires us, today offers the promise of deeper relationship with God.

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree is about time and wasting time. For a gardener a barren tree is a waste. Fig trees quickly deplete soil. Unfruitful trees take nutrients from the healthy ones, barren trees waste resources and labor. In the parable, the vineyard owner is patient, waiting 3 years for the tree to produce. There is logic in the vineyard owner's decision to be rid of the long-barren tree. A servant asks for one more year of grace time, proposing appropriate steps for growth. The owner is willing to be yet more patient and grants the gardener's request.

We need ears to hear: the thing with roots, trunk, branches, and leaves may look like a tree, but if there is no fruit, it is worthless. Look, says Jesus in the parable, someone may look like a human being, but if there is no visible fruit worthy of God's kingdom, such a person is barren.

Note that in the story the servant does not instigate a whirlwind of activity; the servant does the necessary and nothing more; too much or the wrong intervention, produces nothing. The necessary is done, then grace time. We must hear and live this; we fill up every moment with noise, activity, even in the Church. We waste time being busy with frenzied ministries, perhaps suffering the delusion that we bring about our own growth, perhaps so we will feel better about ourselves.

Jesus yearns to give each of us what is needed for growth and fruitfulness. The same can be said for congregations: God will supply everything needed for every ministry to which God calls us and that we are willing to accept. Therefore, the pertinent question for any activity is not, "Can I or we do it?" but "Is God calling me/us to this ministry?" God does not create to destroy. God desires to give you a full, happy, holy, fruit-producing life. We are created to grow and bear fruit to God's glory. A barren tree is 'anti-creation;' a fruitless follower of Jesus is a walking contradiction.

God loves you so passionately that the Holy Spirit will tend you, doing all that is necessary, right, and timely for growth in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit God's love in Jesus is planted into your life, into all life, to grow you into the beauty of God. Give up trying to impress or please God. Salvation is God's work in you, through faith in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. To be in this garden, to be lovingly cared for is simplicity itself: we need only let go of the useless, stop wasting time on trifles that cannot possibly bring fulfillment and accept every day, every moment God's ever-present love. Yearn to grow according to God's wisdom for you; you need not know now who you finally will be.

We believe in a Creator who keeps on passionately creating, not just the universe, but each man and woman, teenager, boy and girl, babe in arms. The Medieval spiritual writer Meister Eckhart wrote: "What does God do all day long? He gives birth. From the beginning of eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth to the All." We are to grow and keep on bearing fruit, being outward, visible signs of God's always creating love. We are to be fruitful love in Jesus: fruitful in good works, fruitful in worship and prayer, fruitful in kindness and forbearance in relationships: loving others in and for Christ for their continuing conversion; accepting their love as they can give love. Jesus Christ in each new moment of grace will grow you into the fruitful beauty of God.

Praise the Lord, all you nations; laud him, all you peoples. For his loving-kindness toward us is great, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever (Psalm 117). Amen.