

Sermon 3/20/22 3rd Sunday of Lent “Parable of the Fig tree”

IUCC Darlington

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Text Luke 13:1-9

Following in our season of Lent and the theme of hard scriptures, today’s lesson is Jesus and his Parable about a Fig tree. You may have heard this Parable before, and if you have, then you know that we consider this an analogy. In this lesson, we imagine that the landowner represents God, and the Fig Tree represents you and me as fruit trees.

We don’t grow a lot of figs in Wisconsin, but we do grow other fruit trees – Apples for sure, Pears and Cherries too. This parable isn’t a lesson in becoming a Fig tree expert. I’m sure that it’s possible that in 3 years some trees will bear fruit, maybe 5 or 8 years for others. The question for Jesus in this story isn’t about the number of years, it’s about bearing fruit, becoming productive. God is the one who expects us to produce fruit. What sort of fruit, you may be wondering? Here are a few ideas that I found...

- The Fruit of the Spirit (5 of them, Galatians 5:22-23)
 - *By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.*
- The Fruit of our mouths (voiced praise, Hebrews 13:15)
 - *Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.*
- The Fruit of Righteous life (our lives, James 3:17-18)

- *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*
- The Fruit of Good Works (Col 1:10)
 - *so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.*
- The Fruit of Souls won to Christ (John 4:35-36)
 - Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

While we focus on the Fig Tree parable, we should also notice in today’s lesson the first part covers an important point for us to consider. For background, I will remind you that God has rules. Shocking? We know from the Old Testament that God shares the Ten Commandments with Moses and with us. Further, we see the idea of sin can be passed on from parents to children – I always think of the phrase “The sins of the father”. In Exodus 20:5 *“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me”* We know that God wants us to turn away from sin. It’s a recurring theme throughout the Old and New Testaments.

So keeping this idea of sin in mind, we see that Jesus mentions a tragic and horrible recent event, an event that the people will recognize at once. Jesus phrases it almost like a trick question – here’s a more modern translation. Were the people who died in the twin towers on 9/11 more sinful than the rest of us? Did their parents all do something bad? It is a terrible question to think about. And Jesus answers them “no”. Then he gives some more examples. In each case, he says no but he adds to the answer to say that if we the people do not repent, bad deaths will happen for us as well.

Wasn’t there somebody else in the New Testament that warned us to repent? A weirdo wearing stinky camelhair clothes? He ate bugs for lunch! A prophet who was a cousin of Jesus, who baptized Jesus in the River Jordan? Yes, John the Baptizer’s main message (to anyone who would overlook his appearance) was that we need to repent and turn away from our sinful lives and turn towards God. The first half of our reading today is all about repentance. Lent is a great time to think about turning towards God.

I think the main lesson I want us to take away from today’s scripture is that God is patient. The property owner doesn’t cut the tree down at once. Instead, he’s giving it another year to develop fruit. God wants us to come to him, to develop that connection with him. He doesn’t want us to be turned away. Yes, the day will come when those vines that didn’t come to God will be destroyed, the day of Judgement. But for now, we have a chance to turn towards God. The terrible stories with the mention of repentance, the fig tree that will be cut down if it doesn’t produce fruit.

These are both about us. Jesus is encouraging us to get closer to God and turn towards God.

How can we do that? Taking the time to pray is a great way. More time in prayer is always a good thing. We can pray from the Psalms We can read our Bible and pray about what we just read. I had a great verse in a devotional this week to share about prayer: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.” from Colossians 4:2. Repentance means turning away from sin and towards God. Amen.