

Luke 13:1-9  
March 20, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you could ask Jesus for anything, what would you ask for?

Would you even know what to ask for?

Often we look around at other people and we see what they are doing and think – ok, I'll try that.

Or we hear them say something worked for them, and we try it, but it doesn't work for us.

And we go to prayer and we ask God for what we think might help us grow and feel fulfilled, and yet, nothing.

And maybe that hasn't happened to you at all, and that's great!

But, if that has been your experience, maybe you think you are a grapevine, when in reality, you are a fig tree.

Did you notice that there was a fig tree planted in the vineyard? That's kind of weird, right? A vineyard, by definition, grows grape vines, and yet, there is a fig tree. A fig tree who is not producing any fruit. Is it not producing fruit because it's been planted in the wrong place – a vineyard?

But, the man who owns the vineyard planted that fig tree there. That's where he put it and when it doesn't do what he wants, he complains. It hasn't produced any figs, so he wants it killed. He's not making any money off of this tree. The tree that he planted and now wants to kill.

The man doesn't care about the shade the tree produces, or the home it makes for the birds, he's only concerned about money making figs.

The gardener, however, sees the fig tree as a fig tree, not a grape vine. He knows that a fig tree has different requirements than grape vines. You can't treat a tree like a vine and expect it to bear fruit.

The gardener knows that the fig tree is out of place in the vineyard, and he also knows that that tree still has a lot of potential. It just needs the right kind of tending. So, the gardener steps in on behalf of the fig tree and saves its life.

He adds manure and gives the tree what it needs to produce fruit. He saves its life for at least that year.

I have a feeling though that the following year he would do the same thing if didn't produce fruit, and would continue to do so until it did produce fruit.

It is the gardener's job, to make things grow and live into their full potential, no matter where they are planted, and so the gardener won't give up on the tree and will help it produce the good fruit it was created to produce.

In this parable, the man who owns the vineyard is just a man, a person who judges other things based only on the worth he finds in them. If you don't give me what I want, I have no time or place for you.

Jesus is the gardener, the one who sees us for who we are, can recognize the difference between a vine and a tree, and loves us first, before we produce any fruit at all.

And Jesus doesn't give up on us. Instead, Jesus gives us what we need, namely the Holy Spirit, who nurtures us so that we can produce fruit for the sheer joy of producing fruit, not so that someone else can make money off of us.

When I was in the youth group at my home congregation, about maybe 15 years old, I volunteered to read the New Testament lesson for the Youth Service. On the Saturday before the service, we had our practice session. I had read the text and was ready to go, but I totally stumbled when I got up in front of the group. It was as if I didn't even know how to read. It was bad. I admit that.

Everyone groaned and thought this is going to be horrible. They tried to get me to do something else, but I was sure I could do it. It was actually kind of sad how I was treated. No encouragement at all, so I know exactly how the fig tree felt.

The next day everyone was shaking their head and saying, you don't have to do this. Their words were – you don't have to do this. Their intent was – we don't want you to ruin everything. When things like that happen, I go into my shell, but I refused to give up. The bulletin already said I'd be doing the reading, and I'm no quitter.

So, I got up into the lectern and the words just came out of my mouth. I wasn't even reading. It was as if someone else was speaking through me. When I finished, everyone was just looking at me like – Wow! Where did that come from?! Good job. You didn't screw it up after all.

People judged me as not being good enough and they wanted to remove me from the service, but the Holy Spirit fortified me and I was able to produce good fruit for that service, not for the people who were judging me, but for the glory of God.

The truth is that people may give up on us, but God will not. God knows us and gives us what we need to produce good fruit for God, which is for the benefit of others, but it's God first.

The people who were telling Jesus about the Galileans who were killed by Pilate at the temple were judging those people as being less than, after all, their thought was, only bad things happen to bad people. The same thing with the people killed at the Siloam tower. They thought that they must have deserved it somehow.

These people were so busy judging others that they didn't take any time to look at themselves. If they would have spent ½ as much time judging themselves, they would have realized that they were the ones who needed to turn back to God. They needed to repent of their own sins, and not think they were better than those who were killed in Jerusalem.

They were so busy thinking of themselves as being good grape producing vines, aka righteous, that they didn't realize that they were actually the fig trees in need of a Savior. And that's the big difference between the two. In this parable, the vines don't need a Savior, but the fig tree does, and so Jesus goes to work giving the tree what it needs, loving it, so it could do what it was made to do – to give glory to God, not necessarily to make the man rich.

During Lent, we remember that God alone is God. God alone judges, it's not our job. We acknowledge that we need a Savior, we repent, turn back to God, and it is only then that we can produce any good fruit at all – the good fruit of loving our neighbors as ourselves. That's an act that can only happen in pure humility.

When we judge the worth of others, we put ourselves in God's place. When we acknowledge our weakness of judging, we are opened up to healing and love.

We are all fig trees in need of a savior. Jesus sees us and knows what we need, and continually gives us the manure that helps us grow – the Church, Holy Communion, and the fellowship of believers. Those are God's gifts that help us grow and enable us to produce good fruit.

It's easy to think we are good happy vines, but when we realize that we are fig trees, Jesus saves us from our sin and strengthens us to do his will in the world, which is producing good fruit – loving others as we ourselves are loved by God.

We are fig trees in need of a savior, and we have one who comes to us before we even realize we need him – Jesus Christ is our Lord, Savior, and Healer – he is our loving gardener who never gives up on us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.