

Sermon for March 23, 2025 – Lent 3

Luke 13:6-9 (EHV)

Theme: God Looks for the Fruits of Repentance

- 1) He is right to expect this fruit.
- 2) He warns against fruitlessness.
- 3) He does all he can to encourage our fruitfulness.

*<sup>6</sup>He told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it, but he did not find any. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, ‘Look, for three years now I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Cut it down. Why even let it use up the soil?’ <sup>8</sup>But the gardener replied to him, ‘Sir, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. <sup>9</sup>If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down.’”*

“It’s my life, so I can do what I want with it!” Many people have adopted this mantra, but is it true? Does your life belong to you alone? The world says that as long as you don’t hurt other people, you should be able to do whatever you want because the only person to whom you must answer is yourself.”

“It’s my life, so I can do with it what I want!” What does God think about this statement? For the phrase “it’s my life,” the Lord says to the Christian: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*<sup>i</sup>

Concerning the statement “I can do whatever I want with it,” the LORD says: *Walk down the roads on which your heart leads you and on the way your eyes see—but know that for all these, God will bring you into judgment.*<sup>ii</sup>

Despite popular belief, you are not your own. God created and saved you for a purpose: to serve Him alone. We must remember that because we often live as if we are only answerable to ourselves.

Our sermon text for today reminds us that we Christians are like fig trees that the LORD has planted to produce God-pleasing, spiritual fruit. Let us consider this truth under the theme: **God looks for the Fruits of Repentance** 1) He is right to expect this fruit. 2) He warns against fruitlessness. 3) He does all he can to encourage our fruitfulness.

Part One: He is right to expect this fruit.

Our sermon text is a parable Jesus spoke after warning against impenitence.<sup>iii</sup> Did He intend it for blatant unbelievers? No, but for those who consider themselves God's chosen people. Jesus spoke this parable with us in mind, desiring that we use it to reflect upon our relationship with God.

*<sup>6</sup>He told them this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.*

God the Father is the man who planted the tree, and the vineyard represents His Church - the grand sum of all believers. The fig tree represents an individual Christian that God "plants" in His vineyard when the Holy Spirit creates faith in a person's heart through the Gospel. Moreover, the LORD planted such an individual in His Church for a specific purpose: to produce the God-pleasing, spiritual fruit of repentance.

*He came looking for fruit on it.*

Just as any orchard owner desires to find fruit on His trees, the LORD has every right to expect "fruit" from us Christians. And what is the fruit God desires from us? The Bible says: "*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*"<sup>iv</sup> To summarize, the fruit God desires from us is the evidence of His Spirit working in our lives. The fruits of a repentant faith are being Christ-like in our attitudes and actions: as the Bible says: *Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*<sup>v</sup>

God has every right to expect spiritual fruit from us. Why? Because He created and saved us for that very purpose. Just as the genetic code of a fig tree causes it to produce figs, the spiritual DNA of a Christian (the new spirit God placed in us at conversion) compels us to produce the spiritual fruit that pleases Him. In essence, we don't need to produce fruit to save ourselves from judgment; instead, we do so because we are God's beloved, forgiven children, cleansed and reborn through the waters of Baptism.

Part Two: He warns against our fruitlessness.

*A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.  
He came looking for fruit on it, but he did not find any.*

The tree with no fruit signifies the Christian who exhibits no fruits of repentance. Who are such fruitless Christians? Before I answer that, I want to draw your attention to the account of the fig tree Jesus and his disciples encountered on His way to Jerusalem. The tree looked healthy and leafy – possessing all the signs that it should have fruit. However, when Jesus inspected the fig tree, He found none.<sup>vi</sup> Fruitless Christians often appear like the fruitless fig tree Jesus observed on his way to Jerusalem: they appear to possess spiritual fruit but produce none.

Let me give you an example of what I mean: Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, offered sacrifices to the LORD. From all outward appearances, both sacrifices seemed to indicate their devotion to God. However, the Lord rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's. Why? The Bible tells us that Abel's offering was his fruit of faith, while Cain's was not.<sup>vii</sup>

That invites the question: why would Cain offer a sacrifice to God if he didn't believe? I think he did it out of a sense of obligation, trying to earn God's favour instead of receiving it with a repentant heart. Why do I assume this? Because that is how the Jewish religious leaders in Jesus' day offered their sacrifices to God. Sadly, it is also how many Christians try to worship the LORD today.

So, what does a fruitless Christian look like? He can resemble any one of us. The fruitless tree could be the most outwardly generous and pious Christian (like certain Pharisees in Jesus' day), or he could be the Christian who uses God's grace as an excuse to sin. The fruitless fig tree could be any one of us because only God can search the heart. Therefore, only God and the individual can know the truth about his or her faith.

Jesus' warning in our sermon text isn't just for the Jews of His day or the person sitting next to you. It's for you. He wants all of us to examine our hearts and determine whether our worship is a God-pleasing fruit of repentance or a fruitless display of self-righteousness.

*So he said to the gardener, 'Look, for three years now I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Cut it down. Why even let it use up the soil?'*

Even though God is very patient when searching for fruit, He won't be patient forever. The "tree" in question reveals itself to be an unbeliever like Cain, not a repentant believer like Abel. His lack of fruit exposes him as a fraud.

A fruitless tree doesn't belong in an orchard. Why not? Because, just like weeds in a garden, it drains the soil's nutrients, hindering the nearby trees' fruitfulness. Similarly, an impenitent, self-righteous, or self-indulgent Christian, who exhibits no fruits of faith, hinders other Christians from being fruitful. That is why the LORD threatens to remove the unfruitful Christian (the impenitent) from the Church.

I want to pause here a moment and ask: Does this parable bother you? I hope it does. Why? So that you can reflect on your relationship with God. Why do you do the things you do: out of gratitude for God's grace or as an obligation to earn His favour? Do you live to glorify your Saviour or satisfy your personal desires? God has every right to expect the fruits of repentance from us. Sadly, I must admit that I am not always fruitful. Worse yet, I could never produce the fruit in which God takes pleasure on my own. I am a sinful man, full of self-righteous pride and the desire to rebel against God's commands. And what is true of me is true of you too. How do I know? God says it in the Bible! For this reason, I fall before the LORD in repentance, asking Him to be merciful to me for Jesus' sake.

How does the Lord respond? He forgives me, just as He promises to do for all who turn to Him in repentance and faith. More than that, He sends His Spirit to encourage me with His Gospel, creating in me a genuine love for Him that manifests in my attitudes and actions. And what the Lord does for me; He does for you too.

Part Three: He does all he can to encourage our fruitfulness.

*<sup>8</sup>But the gardener replied to him, 'Sir, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. <sup>9</sup>If it produces fruit next year, fine. But if not, then cut it down.'*

The gardener in this parable is Jesus. Listen to Him plead to His Father on behalf of the fruitless, begging His Father for patience. "Just a little more time," Jesus cries. He will do all he can to revive the faith in the Christian who has lost it.

And what tools does Jesus use to revive the fruitless? He uses the pruning shears of His Law to cut at our self-righteous pride and hearts' callousness. Once the law has done its work to get us to repent of all sin, then He fertilizes and waters us with the

Gospel of His gracious love. He reveals to us how He kept the law perfectly in our place, thereby winning the righteousness we need before God. He reminds us of how He paid for all our sins through his sacrificial death on the cross. Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, He offers us the very body and blood He used to win our salvation. As He places these gifts before us, He says: "Believe in me and be forgiven because I have paid the price for your salvation. My Father has redeemed you in me. Through Holy Baptism, He has washed away all your sins and adopted you as His child."

And, as our hearts get exposed to the warmth of the Son's love revealed to us in His Gospel, the Holy Spirit nourishes and enlivens our faith. He does this so that we might produce the spiritual fruits in which God the Father takes such great pleasure: the fruits of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. These fruits reveal us as God's chosen and holy people. And if we remain in the glorious light of Christ, how can we not produce such fruit? How can we not confess with the Apostle Paul: *the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.*<sup>viii</sup>

But if you are so callous that you don't produce any fruits of repentance while basking in the light of Christ, then you reveal yourself as a fraud – someone who, like Cain, might put on a good show, but is not repentant and, therefore, not a genuine Christian. Regarding such, God's patience will come to an end. As Jesus warns, they will be cut out of His vineyard – that is, cast out of the holy Christian Church.

Dear Christian, your life is not your own. It belongs to Jesus. Consider His love for you. Consider the price He paid for you. Don't live selfishly but repentantly – basking in the great salvation He won for you. In the peace of His forgiveness, live for Him as He lived for you. Then the fruits of your faith will be evident to all – not in a way that glorifies you, but that glorifies Jesus and all that He does for, in, and through you. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Ecclesiastes 11:9b EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 13: 5 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Galatians 5:22 EHV

<sup>v</sup> Ephesians 5:1-2 EHV

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Mark 11:13

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Hebrews 11:4

<sup>viii</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-14 EHV