

2018-19-16 Luke 13:1-9 **Can we expect fruit in this season?** Lent 3 March 24, 2019

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God's grace and peace continue to bear fruit in your lives through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Sermon Text is from Luke 13:1-9

These are your words heavenly Father. Through them may you work in us to produce fruit! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Our theme for the sermon is about expecting fruit this time of year. I know that we don't even have leaves or flowers on trees, let alone fruit. But, Jesus is talking about a different kind of fruit, the fruit of people who repent of their sins. This kind of fruit, especially during the Lenten season, is very fitting. During Lent we see the depth of suffering that Jesus willingly was subjected to for us. And we say, what a waste if we don't benefit from all that He did for us. It's not that God wants to withhold from us the blessings of Jesus' suffering and death. But by our evil thoughts and actions we may be blocking His saving work from blessing us instead of having the faith to receive it. So I ask again:

Can we expect fruit in this season?

First, God is expecting the fruit of repentance! There were two examples in verses 2-5 where people's lives were cut short and we don't know if they were ready to die. Once Governor Pilate killed several Galilean men who had come to Jerusalem to worship. Whether they were caught up in a riot or just in the wrong place, they ended up dead. The other example was when a tall tower in Jerusalem collapsed killing 18 people. The natural thought of people who had survived was that those who had died must have been especially sinful for this to happen to them. The people talking with Jesus felt safe that they were not such terrible sinners whose lives were in jeopardy. Jesus made it clear that all people are sinful. All people deserve death whether it comes early in life or later. The question for His hearers and for us is: what kind of repentance prepares us for death?

The Greek word for repentance means to change your mind. If we are repenting, our way of thinking about something has completely changed. Repentant sinners change from loving sin to hating sin and loving God's holiness. We learn from God's law what a sin against God is and we also realize God's just punishment that we deserve for our sins. We are sorry for sins. But, repentance is more than feeling sorry. Judas felt remorse for betraying Jesus, but he did not turn to Jesus to receive forgiveness.

True repentance is not something we work in us. The Holy Spirit must convict us of sin so that we realize we cannot save ourselves. Then, our gracious God offers forgiveness in the gospel of Christ. We receive through the empty hand of faith the righteousness which saves us from God's judgement.

True repentance connects us Christ. Through faith in Him our sins are forgiven. God sees that every wrong word or action we have done has disappeared in wounds of Christ. And through His perfect Son, He sees only good remaining in us. Salvation is not based on us or our works, but on what Christ has already done for us, which we now have through faith. This is why Jesus went to Jerusalem to die. By his death God forgave the years of our unfruitful lives.

Second, in Christ, how can we produce good fruit? Our verses state, Jesus told a parable: *"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' " "Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down'" (v. 6-9).*

As Christians, we have all been like that planted tree in the garden. God planted His Word in our hearts through baptism and by hearing the Good News of Jesus. Faith came through the Word of Christ. The Holy Spirit created in us a new life of faith that not only receives Jesus' forgiveness, it hungers for more of God's Word. As we receive His forgiveness, we're reminded of our rescue from hell and the gift of eternal life. In response to God's blessings, we will live in ways that honor Him.

From a human point of view, in a hostage situation if our lives were saved by brave law officers who risked their lives to keep us from serious harm, we would be thankful to them. We would want to honor them. God sent His Son who actually died to save us from the dreadful judgment. Jesus wasn't just the gardener who fertilized the tree to help it produce fruit. He took our place as the fruitless tree and He was cut down in the judgment of God and thrown to the fires of hell as He hung on the tree of the cross. His suffering and death produced enough fruit to cover all the people of the world. God raised Him from death as the firstfruit of all who belong to Him. In heaven, Jesus daily pleads for us before His Father, just as in the parable the caretaker pleaded for the fruitless tree.

As believers in Christ, it is only natural to want to live in ways that honor Him. We will gladly hear and learn His Word. We will take time to worship. We will tell our family and friends the great things Jesus has done. This is part of the fruit of hearts of faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is working through His Word to give us strength to produce fruits which are pleasing to God.

The word repentance and the call for devoted lives to God are closely connected with fruit. John the Baptist had preached, "*Produce fruit in keeping with repentance*" (Matthew 3:8). This fruit of repentance God not only demands but supplies through His Son. Turning from sin and trusting in Jesus' forgiveness we begin to live as God's people showing fruits of our faith. Jesus said, "*I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5).

Those last words of Jesus warn us to daily repent of our sins or two things can happen. One, we can let the power of sin overtake us so that we become cut off from Christ's saving power. Jesus told a parable of the seeds planted, where some seeds grew up among the weeds and were choked so the plant did not produce fruit (Mark 4:7). So, keep repenting. The other is even worse: that we take granted all that Christ has done to save us. We neglect God's Word and Sacraments and our faith weakens. Like many at Jesus' time, their religion became empty. They replaced fruit of the Spirit with fruits of their own rules for life. That is why God sees the lives of so many people today as fruitless. May we not be among them!

Thankfully, Jesus' parable shows the patience of God. The vine-keeper pleaded, "*Leave the [fruitless tree] alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down*" (v.8-9). The Bible states, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise.... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

May God help us this season of Lent to keep taking to heart His Word, to confess our sins to God, and to receive the fruit of Christ's work for our full forgiveness! Then, in Christ the Holy Spirit will continue to produce in us the fruit of true faith. We will thank our God in every way as we live for Him. We pray: "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise" (ELH 444 vs. 1). Amen