

The Lord is Searching for Fruit

Sermon April 3, 2022

Scripture reading: Malachi 3:6-14 & Luke 13:1-9

Golden Verse: “*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.*” Luke 13:8-9

God is a giving and caring God, but He wants to see the fruit of His amazing grace.

In this parable, the farmer goes out to his vineyard, where he has a fig tree. He searches for fruit on it but can’t find any. That tree hasn’t produced anything in three years. The farmer did not intend to plant this fig tree as an ornamental tree but planted it with the hope that, in a few years, it will bring fruit. For this, he cared for this tree, doing his very best, but the tree disappointed the farmer by not bearing any figs, just leaves. If a fruit tree won’t produce any fruit, there is no reason for it to be kept. It only takes up space and will use the water, the soil, and the sunshine for nothing.

Here, our Lord Jesus Christ is talking about you and me. He treats us with special care, and He makes all sacrifices to help us to bear fruit. So, this is the essence of this parable: God is looking for fruit in us as a result of His loving care.

God does not want to have us in His world just an ornamental tree, but He is expecting us to bear fruit. However, we tend to forget that God has expectations from us. God provides all kinds of care we need but He is expecting us to bear fruit. Jesus was not born into this world to give us a lovely, charming Christmas Eve once a year, but to bring Him as our Saviour into our lives and to help us to bear fruit that can feed others. Jesus did not die on the cross to give us something to meditate about, but to cleanse you and me from sin and to help us to produce more fruit. He did not rise from the dead so we could celebrate the Easter bunny and Easter eggs, but to give us a new home in resurrection and eternal glorious life. God is not speaking to us Sunday by Sunday just to entertain us with songs and meditation but to incorporate His messages in our lives and to do what He is telling us to do. All those gifts God gave us in Jesus, we HAVE to incorporate into our souls, hearts, and works, and we have to bear fruit.

The fruit is the tree’s own testimony about itself, showing how much it’s worth. The tree brings fruit to feed others.

The fruits of the Christian life are those actions that make our human coexistence in the family and society happy, pleasant, and beautiful.

Our fruit is all our words, our deeds, our ministry, and our sacrifice that shows Jesus to our world. Our fruit should be love, joy, peace, goodness, and faithfulness.

Sometimes, we overcomplicate what Christianity is or should be. Jesus explains us in a clear and very simple way in His Sermon on the Mount. He said: Forgive those who offended you; do not be angry with them. Love even those who hate you. May there be joy in you that radiates. Help those who are in need. May every person benefit from your actions.

Dear beloved, the Lord is looking for such fruit in us. God does not want these fruits for Himself but to share them with others. In our world, there is an urgent need for Christian fruit.

Before the parable, Jesus said that if we do not repent, we will perish. "They will all be lost."

As you remember, just a few days before the Russian-Ukrainian war started, in my sermon I said that we must learn to live together in peace, or we will fall together in a deep catastrophe. At that time, I didn't know that the danger to fall into a catastrophe was so close as it is today. It is hard for me to understand that a human being is able to destroy not only our neighbours' buildings but also to kill our neighbours and wipe out cities and countries.

In the evenings, I am sitting with my wife in the family room and watching the news. We both are crying while watching those 3 million people leaving their countries due to war and witnessing that most of them cannot return to their homeland anymore because there is no home to return to. Today, humanity is self-destructing.

In this challenging world, we have to bring the fruit of Christianity. The fruits that God seeks on the tree of the Christian life are love, goodness, and peace. These are absolutely necessary today. What will happen here if the forces of destruction, hatred, and evil tempers are not diminished and won't be stopped by the divine forces of love, peace, and goodwill?

How relevant Jesus' words are today: *"If they do not repent, they will all ... perish."* We can translate this differently here and now: If I don't start to bring more fruit of the Spirit, we all will perish. *"The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* Galatians 5:22-23. Living as faithful Christians and bringing fruit is a life-and-death issue today.

Jesus Christ's definition of love is fundamentally active, based not on what we feel, but rather on what we do. **Love** is self-sacrifice, putting others' needs before our own, following Jesus' example, and humbling ourselves as servants.

Because God has shown us **mercy**, we **HAVE** to show mercy to others; because He has shown us love, we **HAVE** to show love to others. *"We love because He first loved us"* 1 John 4:19.

Joy is more than temporary happiness; joy is lasting and based on more than simply an emotional reaction to our circumstances: it is an active choice of attitude.

As Christians, we are called to be **patient**, especially with our brothers and sisters in the Church. Living in peace with those around us can be a challenge, but we must respond in love, not anger when differences arise between us.

As we struggle to **practice** patience and forgiveness, we look to God, who is patient with us.

Kindness is looking beyond our interests to the interests of others. Because God is kind to us, we should be kind to others in response to His goodness.

Generosity can be translated as goodness. Generosity is about being honourable and charitable. If God has given you much, you can serve Him by sharing it with others.

Some people think that Christianity is just a theory. We have to prove that this is not true. There is only one way to prove this: Bringing the fruit we are talking about today.

Do you feel that the most serious sin that we, the followers of Jesus, commit is fruitlessness? The biggest sin is to be a fig tree that brings no fruit. The sin is not that we are doing something wrong, but that we haven't done something good that should have been done. Sin is if we miss doing something. It is a sin not to bring joy to someone, not to help one another. It is a sin to hate someone, but also it is a bigger sin not to love that hated person.

Let's remember what Jesus said about sin: *"I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me"* Matthew 25:42-43. The biggest sin we can

commit is lack of fruit. Not bringing fruit will show that we, as Christians, are empty. We say empty words, and our actions are empty as well.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned,” said our Lord” John 15:5-6.

Those who do not produce fruit are not in Christ. They may confess that they know the Lord, they may pray, but only our fruit can show that we have a living relationship with Christ.

The farmer in the parable, after years of searching for fruit in vain on the barren fig tree, issued an order: Cut this fig tree out. Why should this take place in vain?

God’s grace is wide and long but not endless. According to the parable, the man who owned the fig tree had a gardener, to whom the owner said: *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 gardener 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’* Luke 13: 8-9.

Dear beloved, I have to tell you that, very often, I am wondering how it is possible that God’s patience with me did not come to an end yet. I am wondering how the Lord has never said to me that He had enough of me. Then I realized why not. The gardener begged for this fig tree to be saved. Jesus Christ on the cross prayed to God to forgive me and you.

The tree got one more year of grace. If it bears fruit, it is good, but if it does not grow now, then ... the owner said.

Let’s think about this for a moment: maybe our last two years during the pandemic were a time of grace. Maybe, this Sunday, this time of service is a time of grace.

Don’t be satisfied bringing just leaves. Bring fruit. Do not make another empty promise to the Lord. Bring fruit. It is not enough to live a “good life.” Bring fruit.

If we embrace Jesus Christ, He will help us to bring fruit. Let it be. Amen