

Luke 13:1-9 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³ "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." ⁶ He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ "Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' ⁸ "But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ 'And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

Today Jesus teaches us another of His many parables. In this parable, the owner of a fig tree goes over to look for figs on that tree that he has planted in his vineyard. He finds nothing at all. Frustrated that all of his planting and working on that tree has resulted in nothing, he is prepared to cut the tree down. But then the caretaker of the tree begs that the tree be given one more year before it is cut down. He says that he will give it the very best of his care. And then if it doesn't produce any fruit, it can be cut down.

Every tree is planted, whether by the wind scattering the seed or by the hand of a planter. When it comes to Christians, every Christian is planted by the hand of the planter God himself. Each Christian is planted in God's vineyard on the day of their baptism. Today, Olivia was planted in God's vineyard. She was planted by God as He claimed her as His own and began His Fatherly care of her. As any good planter, He now promises to care for her. He promises to water her with His word throughout her life to keep her growing strong.

But what does God expect from Olivia? Or does He expect anything? Well put simply, He expects that as she grows, He will see the fruit of His gracious work growing in her life. No, it is not that God wants repayment for His gift of faith to her today. We all know that being in God's kingdom has nothing to do with what we do, it is all by the planting of God himself. We can not repay God nor does He wish us to do so. But God does expect fruit in response to His gift. Why? Because He has planted us, He has watered us, and as long as we don't get in the way, fruit will simply start to grow. It is just what trees that are well-taken care of do.

They grow and they produce fruit. As Olivia grows in her knowledge of God, the fruits of the Spirit she received today will quite naturally begin to line the branches of her life.

God no doubt has the right to expect fruit from all of us. After all, He has planted us in his kingdom through Baptism. He has freed us from the bondage to sin and has given us His Holy Spirit. He has time after time filled us with the promises of his Word. To place it back in the image of the parable, we are fig trees that are well taken care of by our planter. And that being said, He is more than justified to expect the trees of our lives to be full of fruit.

However, as we examine ourselves today, each of us must admit that at times the fruit on the trees of our life is not as bountiful as it ought to be. We see on the branches of our tree grudges and hatred where there should be love. We see sadness and discontentment where there should be joy. Discord grows in peace's place. Quick tempers choke out the fruit of patience. Goodness and kindness are replaced by rudeness. Faithfulness gives way to the fruit of faithlessness. Gentleness does not grow as arrogance blossoms and self-control is knocked of the branch with unbridled sinful desire. Oh to be sure, for those of us gathered here, I certainly hope that we might say with good confidence that when our Lord looks upon our branches that He will find some fruit, but not as much as He should. And because of this, our God has ever right to cut us down. But thankfully, our dear Jesus pleads time and time again for God to not cut us off, for His sake. He begs of His Father that He would continue to patiently endure with us despite our sin. He reminds God that it was for our sin that He died. He places his righteousness all over the branches of our lives so that we appear just as fruitful as Jesus himself.

Our text for the day once again calls us back to the heart of Lenten preparation. We are called to the one thing that always produces fruit. We are called to repent of our lack of fruitfulness. Repentance brings with it the fruit of a changed life as God forgives and fills us up with His Holy Spirit anew. For all those who repent, God patiently bears with them for the sake of His Son. It is only when we stop truly having any real concern for our sin that we place ourselves in danger of being cut out of the vineyard of God's kingdom. The people from Jesus day that H was talking to could list all sorts of sinners worthy of punishment. They in fact comforted their own conscience by knowing the grave sins of other people. It enabled them to think, "At least we are not like

those really bad people. God must be okay with our little sin when He compares it to their great sin.” But Jesus reminded them and reminds us today that sin is sin, and all sin is worthy of punishment. We are not to be comforted by the fact that others in our society are worse than us, but rather convicted by the presence of the sin in our lives. We compare our lives to the perfect life of Christ and not to the gross sinners of our day. Otherwise, we might become content with the level of sin in our life. And that would be grave indeed. Contentment with sin is the one thing that can cause all the fruit in our lives all dry up. It is being comfortable with our own sin that can make it so that the planter God examines us and finds nothing. Indeed, when we see sin becoming more and more prevalent in our life, we surely want to nip it in the bud. Because as Scripture reminds us, sin when it is full grown brings death. We as Christians cannot be comfortable with any sin in our life. This is the message of Scripture. That sin in the Christian’s life is not natural, fruit is natural.

But if we want fruit, how do we get it? Surprisingly the answer is to do nothing. We just allow God to continue to pour out His life-giving word on us. As we hear His word, fruit will come. We are just His trees. As long as we do not fight against His Spirit’s work, fruit will appear. As long as we do not remove ourselves from His house and His word we know that He will continue to take special care of us, and we will produce fruit.

God cared enough about you to send His Son to live and die and rise for you. He cared enough about you to claim you as His own in Holy Baptism. And certainly he cares enough about you to continue to make you a fruitful fig tree growing in the vineyard of His kingdom.

Jesus call to us today is very clear, “Unless you repent you will perish.” But if you repent, I will as the master vinedresser will forgive you and give you every possible thing that you need to bear much fruit. Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.

This is the message for Olivia today. This is the message for each of us. We have been planted and taken care of by our wonderful God. Fruit will come. For when we have not allowed such fruit we repent and rest in the baptismal promises of God to forgive our sins and give to us His Holy Spirit anew. And resting in His promises, we receive true comfort knowing that God has taken care of us most graciously. Thanks be to God that for the sake of Christ we are not cut down, but rather left to grow, left to produce much fruit for our God as He cares for us so perfectly. Amen.

