

# Lent 3 – March 24th, 2019

A funny story is told about the son of a pastor who was in church one Sunday morning and witnessed a baptism. So the next morning, being greatly impressed with the baptism, the little boy decided he was going to baptize his three cats in the bathtub!

The first cat, being fairly young, handled the baptism very well. So then the little boy baptized the second oldest cat, which went OK. So the little boy grabbed the OLD TOM CAT and as he was about to plunge him under the water, the cat clawed and ripped his hands, and got away.

With considerable effort, he caught the TOM CAT again and proceeded with the baptism. But the cat acted worse than ever and clawed him rather severely. So finally, the little boy gave up and he dropped the CAT on the floor and said: **“Fine, just be an Atheist!”**

**Grace and peace to you through God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Have you ever thought about the following statement: God is more patient than we realize? If we stop and think about it for a moment, we will conclude that this is part of what the season of Lent is teaching us.

I wonder how many times you and I have demanded something now because we have that “fast-food service” mindset? When it

comes to waiting, some of us are not very patient.

I certainly confess this is one of my growing edges in life – and having to wait... serves only to annoy or aggravate some of us.

But here is the bottom line: Being patient is a necessary ingredient of repenting and bearing fruit. The “fast-food service” mindset, this “I want it now” is counter to the whole 40 days of our Lenten journey.

Jesus was very clear in his parable today. The fig tree was used to remind us that repent, change your mind and bearing fruit is process that will result in renewal and growth.

**Jesus used a fig tree as symbol to illustrate that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love! You see, God is more patient than most of realize.**

So today, Jesus reminds us that failure doesn't have to keep us down or keep us from trying again. Like the fig tree, we are to focus on God's purposeful in our faith and life.

Perhaps we forget to give our sin and struggles to Jesus. Just maybe we forget that God did not claim us in Holy Baptism and give us that beautiful seed and tree of faith – SO WE COULD LIVE in defeat or depression or remain lifeless.

But renewal and growth takes time. And it is God's grace that

gives us the potential and ability to mature spiritually. And being fertilized with God's life-giving word, with prayer, with wonderful music and loving Christian fellowship – are ways Jesus can transform us to be more productive.

**So let me ask several questions (write these down): 1) What habits are making you fruitful? 2) What habits are making you barren? And thirdly, what in your life seems to impede your ability to draw nutrients from God so you can bear fruit?**

Garrison Keillor, with his brand of humor and profound truth, says it another way; he says: “You can become a Christian by going to church **just about as easily** – as you can become an automobile by sleeping in a garage.” (HA!)

So the parable is clear: we are not baptized to just be here. We are called, baptized and given a seed of faith – to produce figs, to reach-out to others with compassion, with assistance... which is God's work with our hands, heart and blessings! The truth is – God has called each one of us to find a way, to find a place, to find a ministry... where we can be of service and bear fruit. God plants his saving grace and spirit in us for a purpose – and we are not here by accident.

So you say, “Well Pastor, I missed that point during the formation of my faith. And to this point in time, my eyes have been closed to the story Jesus tells about the fig tree and being fruit.”

Here is my response: LIFE'S SECOND CHANCES are what JESUS and the CROSS are all about! **St. Augustine is noted for saying: “God promised forgiveness to your repentance, but HE has not**

**promised tomorrow to your procrastination.”**

You see, we belong to God and He is not finished with any of us. He is still working on me and you... while we practice the spiritual disciplines that facilitate our growth – one day at a time.

**The parable of the fig tree is a vivid reminder that we are NOT to just take up time and space.** We are called to repentance which is the transformation of one's essential being. It affects the whole person and claims our thoughts, words, and deeds, of both disposition and habits. Is this what “Our souls thirst for... “as mentioned in Psalm 63?”

In 1984, while undergoing **desert training** as a Soldier, I recall a Chaplain preaching a field service. The one statement that left an indelible impression on me was this: “The sin of the desert is knowing where the water is located and not telling anyone.”

You see, walking wet in the waters of baptism should inspire us to share the location of the water, so that others may know a life of faith in Christ. And you know what else? Service to others will also help us grow in faith and help others know the importance of living for Jesus Christ!

God calls us to witness to his mercy and grace; **so let your light shine and tell others too;** don't keep the location of the water a secret! Go to the water and take others with you – it gives life and facilitates growth and purpose and fulfillment!

So on this Lenten Sunday, let us consider God's rhetorical question from the Bible: "What shall it profit a man or a woman to gain the whole world but lose his or her soul?"

You see, a fig tree that produces fruit – is one that has been nurtured and cared for by the living spirit of God – and it takes time to develop – 4 years for the fig tree – in our Gospel lesson today. So as trees give witness to God's mercy and need for patience.

The challenge is to learn to model our lives in the same manner. We need to repent, forgive ourselves... so we can love and forgive others!

And so, some Christians need to STOP saying to themselves that they are perfect... because none of us are perfect! The Bible says: All have sinned and all come short of the glory of God. And if this fits you today, get over your perception of sinless perfection because it does not exist. All people need the Lord!

And when (not if) we stumble or fall from grace with a brother or sister, don't cut the tree down – get up with a purpose and use the grace and faith that God has given you – to make things right which is a production of fruit – for God!

You see, the fig tree was spared the AX, and since you are hearing this, SO HAVE YOU!

So, allow me to ask: **How are you doing?** Are you being patient and allowing God to nurture your spirit and mind and soul with

HIS fertilizer – so that you can grow in Christ and bear fruit?

The truth is: **God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...** and grace periods and 2nd chances are God's order of the day! Never give-up on anyone! **Amen!**