

March 3, 2019  
#63  
Mark 11:12-26  
Good News: Trees bear fruit

<sup>12</sup>The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup>Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup>Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

<sup>15</sup>On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup>and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. <sup>17</sup>And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’<sup>[a]</sup>? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’<sup>[b]</sup>”

<sup>18</sup>The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

<sup>19</sup>When evening came, Jesus and his disciples<sup>[c]</sup> went out of the city.

<sup>20</sup>In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup>Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

<sup>22</sup>“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup>“Truly<sup>[d]</sup> I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. <sup>24</sup>Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup>And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Expectations. What is your stand on expectations? When you order the steak at the restaurant to be well done, what do you expect to get? Medium rare? What do you expect when you start exercising? Gain weight? What is your expectations from this worship service? What are your expectations from church? Are you the person who tries to expect the best and then gets very disappointed? Or do you already think it is going to be horrible and try to be a little bit surprised when it is better? I think what is the hardest is to live up to expectations when you do not even know what they are. Worst still: to expect a person to behave in a certain way or do something for you when this person has no clue you expect that from him/her.

In our walk as disciples we know what God’s expects from us and God is very clear about it.



In Mark 11 Jesus and his disciples were leaving Bethany. Verse 12 says: Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree with leaves. He went to find out if there was anything on it.

Before we dig deeper in these challenging verses it is worth remembering that Mark sometimes uses the sandwich structure. We saw this on October 14 when we were discussing Mark 3. What does it mean? When I say “sandwich”, what kind of picture do you see in your head?

In my house we always argue over what it means to have a sandwich. In Eastern Europe you do not need two slices of bread to have a sandwich, but I know you think differently. Since you insist that a sandwich must have two pieces of bread with all the good stuff inside, you will understand how Mark is presenting the story.

The “bread” is the story of the fig tree, it is in the beginning and it is in the end. But the main point – why it is even a sandwich – is because of what is inside.



Many of you grew up eating fig newtons and still consider them a favorite cookie. Again, it is what is on the inside that counts and gives it its name.

Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves. Moses included fig trees in his description of the promised land. In Judges 9 we find an interesting story: The trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be king over us!' The fig tree replied to them, 'Should I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

In 1928, Herbert Hoover made a campaign promise of prosperity by claiming there would "chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage." The dream of prosperity in Bible times was a fig tree, an olive tree and grapevines in every yard.

Jesus was staying in Bethany where he raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. Bethany is about 3 miles from Jerusalem. During what we call Holy Week, Jesus and his disciples were commuting each day on foot to Jerusalem. The day after the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem they walked past a fig tree.

The cursing of the fig tree is symbolic. There are 14 times in the Bible where Israel is compared to the fig tree. (Hos; Nah). So when we consider what Jesus did and why he did it, think of that fig tree as representing Israel.

"Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit.



When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for

figs". This becomes very confusing. Why would Jesus be upset if there is no fruit? It is not time.

I better be careful preaching here in the community with many farmers around.

In my research this is what I found: When the fig leaves sprout you already can see the fruit. Is it the same with other trees that bear fruit?

Yes, it was not the time for the fruits to be ripe, but Jesus was expecting that there will be fruit. The early fig fruit might not be as sweet but you still can eat it.

The early green "fruit" (buds) were common food for local peasants. Jesus sees that this tree has leaves, it growing and flourishing, but there is no fruit on it. So Jesus spoke: "You shall never bear fruit again!".

This goes against our stereotype of Jesus being all kindness, tenderness and sweetness who heals and makes things better.

In the next verse Mark leads us to walk with Jesus into the temple. He did not like the smell of the animals, the noise from the money changers and people who are very



busy and very focused of taking care of business.

Before we start judging these people, let's consider their time and the culture of the worshipping. People traveled to the temple, many of them, from long, dry, hot distances. They came on donkeys if they were wealthy, while the rest came on foot. It was impractical to bring with them a goat or even a pigeon to offer as a sacrifice at the temple. Often they carried only foreign currency, the coin of whatever region they lived in. It was a matter of convenience to provide, right on the temple grounds, a currency exchange, as well as a stall to buy an animal or goat or sheep – or for the especially well-heeled, a bull—to offer as a sacrifice. It served the needs of the people. But Jesus would have none of it.

I am so grateful we find a full picture and God's care and seriousness of what it means to worship God. The fig tree had leaves but no fruit. There was a temple and there were people, but there was no prayer. There was a lot of business but not much in the way of changed lives and very little fruit.

Jesus cares and loves His Father and His people so much that he takes it very seriously when we are distracted from what is the most important and when our lives provide no fruit. Even worse is the condemnation if we lead others astray.

I see two applications for today. First is to my personal life: Have I experienced God overthrowing my tables, my business? How much I cry and do not like it when God turns my life upside down. I am shocked when something happens in my life and I find myself broke? Losing a job? Huge bills? Losing money?

My first reaction is: How I will live? Why is this happening to me? As long as I live in faith, prayer and the word of God, I see a little bit more clearly. What if the cleansing of the temple is more about freeing and releasing than punishing and judging?

Maybe I am too attached and too worried about having more money? Focused more on my vacation than my walk with God. There was nothing wrong in exchanging money and buying a sacrifice... but it became more important and it did not change the people lives. The temple became like this fig tree: Full of leaves and no fruit.

Second is to think about our church. We have a building. We have some people. We are making noise. Are we bearing fruit. What is the fruit of our church? **DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?** Do we care about our community more than about ourselves? Je-

sus does not care about leaves. He cares about fruit. If all what we do does not change how we live, we are barren trees.

According to Galatians 5 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Do you find these in your life and in our life together?

“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers”.

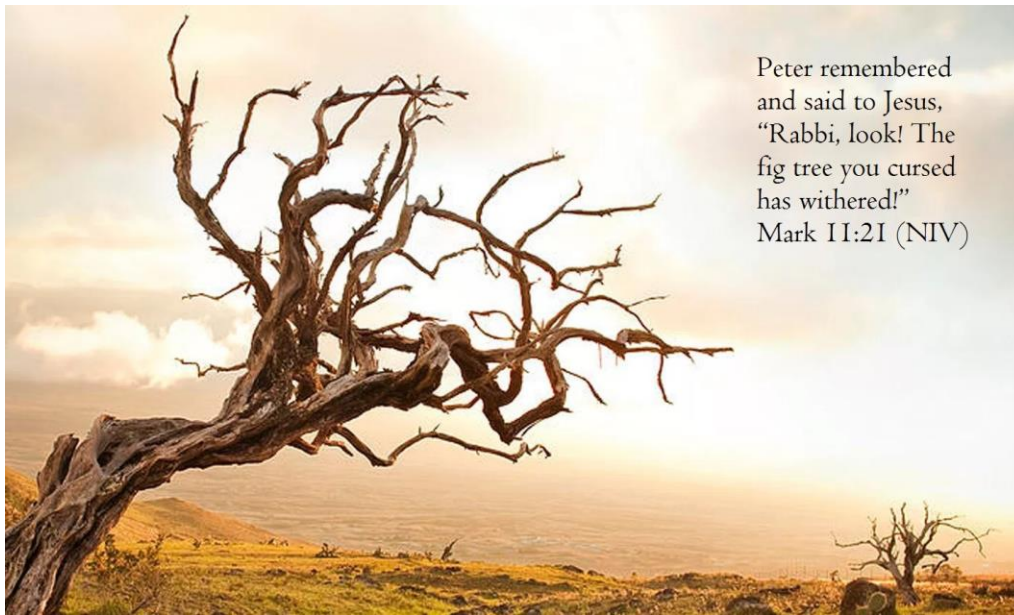
House of prayer means having a place where, together, we can meet with God. We talk to God and we listen to what God says. We seek God, we listen and we live trusting and applying God’s word to our lives.

“The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.”

How do you and I react when someone disagrees with us or makes us uncomfortable or challenges us? We can ignore that person or argue. Far too often, especially in this day of social media, we respond like the chief priest and teachers of the law. We look for ways to destroy them by using pejorative expressions and telling everyone how bad they are – character assassination.

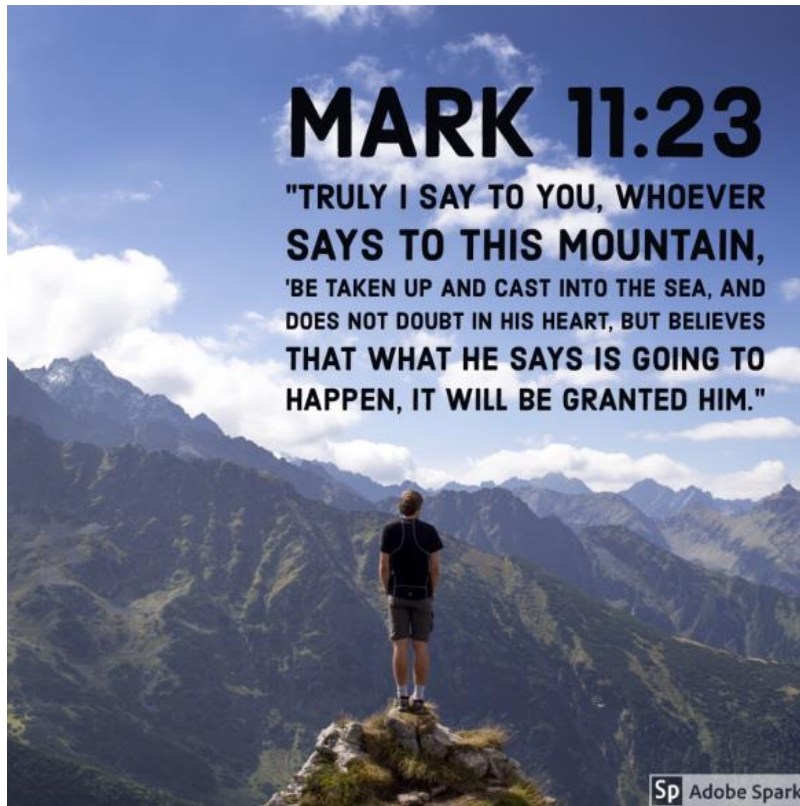
The sandwich ends up with the fig tree again. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.





“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. <sup>23</sup> “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. <sup>25</sup> And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Let us continue to have the whole picture in our heads. Jesus just cleared the tables. He was angry because His Father’s house was no longer a house of Prayer for all the nations. Jesus continues on the theme that our life in God and in worship should produce fruit. It is also true for prayer. It should produce fruit. The fruit in prayer is only possible if you believe. Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Of course, the mountain is a symbol of what God does when we pray and believe. It is not the power of how we pray or how long or how spiritual we are. It is what God is able to do through you when you believe. The mountain would an example of God’s power in our lives.



Let us not question what God is doing or what God can do. How about if we pray about the mountains in our lives. What are the mountains in your life? Let's pray and let the mountain know what a mighty God we serve.

We spend hours talking about our problems. These mountains overwhelm us but we do little more than sit and talk about them. Jesus says to speak **to** the mountain. Face the problem and start acting.

**I Corinthians 4 says "The Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power."**

Jesus adds one more thing.

"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." God's power is powerless if we hold anything against anyone. We become the worst enemies of ourselves.

May our prayer bring fruit in our lives. May our worship and our church be a true community of believers who are passionate about proclaiming and preaching good



news to everyone in every way. May we be able to forgive and have the power of God in us, that makes impossible possible and brings glory to God.