

Faithfully Bearing Fruit Even in Dry Seasons
based on Mark 11:12-25, David Jahnke, 9/6/15

When Jesus came to Jerusalem, the city of God, he was hungry. His body needed nourishment. But the fig tree near him had no fruit.

According to Paul, Jesus' body fills everything in every way. He is the light of all life through whom all things are created according to John. And the one in whom we love and move and have our being according to Luke. Jesus is at the core of all things and sustains all things. His presence makes every person and every life sacred and blessed.

Sometimes I hear Christians saying things like "I am not worthy, Lord!"; not worthy of God's love or his salvation. They say this because we mess up time and again but I still think we all are worthy. Because we were all wonderfully and beautifully made by God and his Son came and restored God's goodness inside us. So everyone is worthy of love and salvation.

I saw a video yesterday of a family who has spent countless hours and millions of dollars to set up their own private rescue operation, saving immigrants and refugees in danger on the Mediterranean Sea. One member of the family summed it up, "If you see someone drowning, you go to help them!"

That's where we begin. Many in Jerusalem did not feel the Gentile nations, certainly not the Roman occupiers or sinners-- none were worthy of God's salvation, due to what they believed or how they lived. May we never make the same mistake.

We were, in fact, created to bear the fruit of God's salvation. But we are not so great at that. Like the fig tree, our faith and love run dry and we struggle to feed anyone deep down, even ourselves. Our spirits and bodies wither like the fig tree and eventually, we die.

So Jesus' judgment of the fig tree should be taken as a warning about what comes to those who refuse to receive and bear the fruits of love which is what we were created for-- just because life is hard or because we feel dry.

I remember conversations with youth during a lock-in at the Korean Church. They had learned that they shouldn't do anything for the Lord begrudgingly or if they could not do it gladly. I am guessing this was based on Paul's advice to give gladly and not under compulsion. So I understood where they were coming from but I told them that we may not always feel like doing good things. And sometimes doing does not make us feel good. But we are called to do it anyway. Sacrifice is costly—and it is sometimes painful rather than fulfilling.

So the fig tree reminds us that we need to press forward in bearing fruit even when our faith or spirit or life circumstances are dry. And so many of you do just that! You keep serving food and clothing the poor, visiting the distressed, teaching, singing, keeping this house of God in working order, even though you may not be in the mood to do so and/ or find the experience disappointing on a particular day. So thank you for your witness to Jesus' sacrifice and perseverance.

But I also feel pity for the fig tree. This poor guy was judged for not bearing fruit when it was not even the season for figs. And I feel the same compassion for all people out there who wither under the judgment of sin and death because they are not bearing much, if any, fruit.

And if I feel this pity, imagine how much more pity God feels for them and us, which brings us to the money-changers and salesmen around the temple, the house of God. We too exchange good things and our own talents as if they belong to me or you. But all things are God's; and the whole earth, including these bodies are His home. So when strangers come to these temples of the Holy Spirit or when we bring these temples to others, will we hoard God's blessings or expect something in return? Will we only be concerned with preserving and saving ourselves and those close to us? When we turn inward like this, our spirits start to shrivel.

God's plan was for all peoples to share all things for all eternity! Thank God, His plan is not thwarted by our actions. He sent Jesus to show us God's Way of loving and feeding and forgiving and giving to all. And at the end, He died to show us that death and dryness and dust are not victorious; that Life in God's perfect Kingdom is, not only in heaven but here on earth too. Jesus' body was raised, heralding the fulfillment of his prayer that the Kingdom would come to earth.

Do we believe this? Do we trust in the world revealed by Jesus? My God, the mountains that would be moved if we really did.

I was at my brother's house this week. And I heard about my 13-year old niece's friend who came over and spent the night at their house. She has never known her father and her mother has struggled with drug abuse—in and out of rehab. My brother asked her what she would like for dinner and gave her some options. And she said that she eats everything just fine because sometimes there is nothing on the table to eat when she comes home in the evenings. And she was so well-mannered and grateful and as soon as the meal was done, she got up and cleared the whole table without anyone asking her to do anything.

She has so little but her faith is allowing her to move the mountains of poverty and parental neglect. She is overcoming the dryness of life and not only bearing fruit every day but bearing witness to over-privileged kids. My brother was like, "It is so good for Tatum—my niece-- to have a friend like her." She is our example; our goal.

But now I want to step back and think again about the implications of what faith *could* do. Jesus had just miraculously made a fig tree wither. So when he says that our faith could move mountains, he is speaking literally. And that means that we would all be capable of wonderful, miraculous things if we possessed the kind of faith he did.

Have you done any supernatural miracles lately? Me either. Our faith is much closer to people who think they do not believe than to Jesus'. And the flip side of Jesus' connecting faith and acts of salvation...is that the fruit that quote-unquote "non-believers" produce witnesses to a measure of faith and witnesses to the God working in and through all who are committed to Love and Truth and Peace and Salvation.

So while we care deeply about the spiritual journey of others, we can relate to and cooperate with all rather than being anxious about them. We concentrate on how we share Jesus, rather than worrying about our differences.

And anyway, we have plenty of our own faith work to do! What kind of a prayer life do you have? How often do you turn to God and give thanks and say we are sorry and ask for guidance and praying for those who are in need. I pray quite a bit but I know how much more I could be doing so. Paul says we can and should be praying ceaselessly. How about that for a goal? Relating everything in our lives and our hearts and minds all the time...to God?

Jesus' teaching that we can do so much through faith should compel us to recommit to discipleship that grows our faith. We need to feed the Christ inside us! And I know how busy and tired we all are but I would love to see you not only on Sundays, but on Tuesday afternoons, or Wednesday evenings or Thursday evenings. God is doing exciting things here this year.

God is doing exciting things in America! Yesterday, Christie just posted a CBS newscast on the #2 movie in America right now. It's a Christian movie called "War Room." It is all about a couple who are going through troubles and who turn things around through committing themselves to prayer. How wonderful that this movie is the second most popular in America. May we and everyone who sees it apply its core theme about the power of prayer to transform our lives and our world.

Just yesterday I was feeling a bit down in the dumps, probably related to the pain in my shoulder and chest from a mountain bike spill Friday. I am in the grocery store buying fruit for the children's sermon which led me to lift my thoughts to God and ask him to redeem my day. My mood lifted immediately. I could not lift weights because of this so I played tennis in the park with the boys and then I met, by God's providence, two brothers in Christ and their children and we all played basketball together and talked. And I invited them to our basketball clinics. Just a little reminder that God is far from dead in the northeast.

Of course, no matter what or how much we do or believe or pray, we and all others will fall short of the glory of God. So thank goodness Jesus concludes these prophetic symbols stories of judgment by telling us that must forgive others for their shortcomings so that God will forgive all of ours.

If we whose faith so pales in comparison to Jesus' are expected to forgive others their sins, how much more will our God who is the Loving Father of all forgive His children. Cling to His Mercy and Love as you perceive yourself and your own shortcomings and as you perceive and interact with others. This is how we bear the firstfruits of eternal life, Jesus Christ to an often dry and desolate world. God's Word says He can do far more abundantly in us than all we can imagine so to God belongs all the power and the glory now and forevermore.

