

“Planted For A Purpose”
Luke 13:1-9
March 20, 2022

There is a story of a young man who wanted to become a missionary. He was told to come for an interview with his church’s missionary review board on a Saturday at 7:00am . On the day of his interview it was snowing, but he made his way to the place where the interview would take place, arriving 5 minutes early. The head of the review board met him at the door, took the young man to a room, and told him to wait there until he came to get him to start the interview. The young man waited for an hour when the review board chairman finally came to get him and took him to his office for the interview. The first question the chairman asked was, “Can you spell?” Somewhat surprised, the young man said, “Yes, sir.” “All right,” said the chairman, “then spell church.” “C-H-U-R-C-H,” said the young man. “Very good, now can you add numbers?” asked the chairman. “Yes, sir,” said the young man. “Good, what is 5+2?” asked the chairman. “Seven,” replied the missionary candidate. “Excellent, you passed. I’ll tell the board next week when we have our meeting,” said the chairman. And the young man, somewhat confused, left.

At the review board meeting the next week, the chairman said, “The young man whose file you have in front of you has all of the qualifications to be a fine missionary. His file indicates that he is certainly qualified and I am convinced he will be a good missionary based on the interview I had with him. First, I tested him on self-denial, asking him to meet me here at my office for the interview at 7:00am. He left a nice warm bed on a cold snowy Saturday morning to meet with me. Second, I tested him on promptness. He arrived 5 minutes early in bad weather. Third, I examined him on patience as I made him wait for an hour to meet with me. When we met he didn’t question why he had to wait so long or show any sign of frustration. Fourth, I

tested him on humility by asking him questions that a 10 year-old could answer, and he politely answered each one. So I believe this young man meets the requirements to be a fine missionary.”

Patience, kindness, self-control, and other abilities given to us by the Holy Spirit (the book of Galatians calls these abilities the “fruit of the Spirit”) are certainly needed to be a missionary, but showing those abilities or fruit to others through our words and actions is not only key for a missionary, but also for us if we are going to live as followers of Jesus. After all, God did not save us solely for our benefit, but also for the benefit of others. And Scripture says that there are actually 3 ways that we can bear fruit when it comes to loving and caring for others.

First, we can bear the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, & self control. Second, we can bear the fruit of service, by feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and visiting people who are lonely. Third, we can bear the fruit of being used by the Holy Spirit to bring others into a relationship with Jesus. Bearing fruit is a rather natural process that happens as we walk with Jesus. However, if we are not bearing fruit, then something’s wrong or something needs to change.

Jesus tells the story in our Gospel lesson about a fruitless fig tree. God is the landowner in this story, who is not happy that the tree has not been bearing any fruit. The vinedresser who has been patiently taking care of the tree is Jesus, and the tree represents us. The point of the parable is really not the tree, but Jesus – the vinedresser who has been caring for the tree for 3 years to ensure that it doesn’t get cut down – and of His efforts to insure that it will grow and bear fruit. I would like to read this parable again and I want you to notice what the vinedresser is trying to do, and how he goes about getting results.

“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him,

‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

The goal here in this story is pretty simple: the vineyard owner (God) wants the tree (us) to produce fruit (that we mentioned earlier). And the vinedresser (Jesus) not only saves the tree (us), but He is going to do everything He can to make the tree produce fruit. So the first thing the vinedresser does is to make sure the tree is planted in the right spot. After all, any good gardener knows that placing plants in the right spot is very important. If you put a plant that loves the shade in full sun, it will probably die. But notice where this tree is planted – in a vineyard. Now why is a fig tree planted in a vineyard? The answer – it was put there on purpose.

Apparently in Jesus’ day when wine was made, the way you made it special was to give it certain aromas and scents. And the way vineyard owners did this was to plant fruit trees in their vineyards in order to season the grapes. So, with that in mind, what does that mean for us? Well, have you ever thought about why God planted you here in North Carolina and not in Texas or Idaho? I would suggest that you and I are here, because God wants us to season and scent this area with His love. Now God could have put you in Chicago or Houston, but He didn’t, because He knows this is where you will do the most good or where you will grow right now. Maybe there’s a person here in this area for whom you are the exact aroma of the Kingdom of God that Jesus desires for that person to see or experience.

But Jesus is not going to put us in an area and then leave us. Instead, as a vinedresser will work the soil, feed and prune the tree, the second thing Jesus does is to work on us by shaping us, molding us, and providing for us what we need – namely His Word and the Church – in order for us to grow and bear fruit. My dad grew up on a farm and I remember him telling that while farmers work very hard preparing soil, planting seeds, and harvesting their crops, most of the

things that make those crops grow – rain, sunshine, oxygen, nitrogen, potassium, and other elements come from God. Human beings cannot produce those things, they come from God at just the right time in the right setting. So if you think about it, the same is true for us when it comes to producing fruit. Jesus is the one who does everything that is necessary in order for us to produce fruit. And because of His work, love, and care for us, we should naturally respond with lives that produce fruit and reflect His love.

However, sometimes that doesn't happen and Jesus knows this, because we were all born with a disease in our lives known as sin, that often robs us of our fruit. Think of it this way. When we're sick, our body uses up all of its energy fighting the sickness within us. A healthy body is one in which there is energy to work. A very tall tree can be brought down by a very small bug working inside of it. Do you have any small bugs in your life stopping you from bearing fruit? What sins or fears are holding you back from bearing fruit?

We see in this parable that the owner (God) will not put up with a lack of fruit forever. There will be a time when the owner (God) will act and remove the tree from the garden. This was seen in the Old Testament when it came to God's approach with the people of Israel. God had chosen the people of Israel to be His servants and shining lights to the world, but for generations the people turned against God and worshipped idols. God warned His chosen people that if they did not bear fruit they would be destroyed. God was very patient with them, as He is with us, but they were eventually punished for their idolatry and lack of fruit in their lives and were removed from their land. And God will do the same to us someday if we refuse to bear fruit.

We were planted to produce fruit. We were planted here for a purpose. God wants to touch the world through us. And as people see the positive transformation that Jesus makes in us, they will be drawn to Him and He will change their lives as well. Therefore, may we all bear that

God given fruit of love and forgiveness with others wherever we go so that all people will come to know Him and live forever.