

Sermon

03/07/2010

Another year has begun!
It's hard to believe it is March already!
What kind of a year has 2010 been so far?
Where would you rank it on a scale of 1 – 10?

Maybe you would give the beginning of 2010
an 8 or 9 out of 10 –
in other words,
it is starting off to be a really good year.

It has been a good year because you had
success in your business,
a good year at work or at school,
good family relationships,
new friendships?

Maybe,
early as it is,
2010 has a year that has included a lot of exciting things,
new challenges,
tasks completed . . .
Or maybe you rate this year 8 out of ten
when compared to last year -
and last year was a horrible year

Or maybe you would give
this beginning of 2010 a 5.
It has been just another year,
pretty much the same as any other year?
Nothing very exciting has happened,
in fact, it has been kind of dull and dreary.
Just getting up, going to work,
coming home, going to bed
and then doing the same thing
the next day and the next and the next.

Maybe so far 2010
deserves only 2 out of 10.
That's because it has been a really dreadful year.
Everything that could go wrong
did go wrong.
The year has included tragedy,

sickness, loss of friends,
marriage problems, the kids were just impossible,
even a death in your family.
How would you rate the beginning of this year . . .
how would you rate 2010's beginning?

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Think back and think about what kind of a person
you have been during 2010.
Are there some regrets?
If you were able to do some of it –
or for that matter some of last year –
over again,
would you behave differently?
Would you have shown more understanding,
cared more,
been more patient,
less critical,
been more supportive and helpful?
As I reflect on the beginning of this year
there are certainly things
that I wish I had done differently.

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How about your relationship with God?
Has that relationship flourished and grown during 2010
or has it just hovered in much the same place
as it did the previous year . . .
Perhaps your relationship with God
has even gone backwards as you prayed less,
heard less from God through his Word,
worshipped less.
Maybe God hasn't had a big part to play in your life
during the beginning of this year;
somehow God has just slipped into the background.

You could well ask the question:
how much of my life reflects the fact
that I am God's child –
do I speak as a child of God;
do I act with the love of God in my heart;
do I interact with others
with the same love and forgiveness
that Jesus has shown toward me?

As we stand here,
now in our third month of another year,
Jesus tells us a parable.
It's brief but the point is clear.

"Listen," Jesus says.
"A man has a fig tree and plants it in his vineyard.
(Apparently it was common for fruit trees
to be planted among the vines).
Three years later
he's making his way up and down his vineyard,
he is looking forward to the taste of a ripe fig
but he sees that the fig tree still doesn't have any fruit.
He calls to his gardener,
'Hey! Get over here.
Why is this tree still here?
It's taking up soil and moisture and space.
Cut it down, *right now*.'

Jesus got it right.

Why should that tree remain standing?

Why should it keep taking up space,
using up the goodness of the soil
if it's serving no purpose?

What's the point of having a tree
that should bear fruit but does nothing?

Maybe you've had a tree in your garden
that was a big disappointment
and you have laid into it with an axe
and dug it out roots and all.

Jesus' words,
"*Cut it down, right now,
and stick a match to it*"
cut deeply.

The owner has a right to be disappointed and angry
at that useless tree.
It's no wonder he wants it destroyed.
But as we listen to Jesus story
we know Jesus isn't just talking about a fig tree.

He's talking about you and me.
We are led to ask ourselves,
"Am I bearing fruit?
I keeping sucking up the nutrients of the soil
in which I've been planted
and when am I going to show some kind of fruit
to match the years I've been standing in God's garden
and all the opportunities I've been given?"

Jesus takes a breath and continues.
"Leave it alone for one more year",
the gardener pleads,
"I'll dig around it and fertilize it.
If it bears fruit next year fine!
If not, then cut it down."

And with that,
Jesus ends his story of the fig tree
leaving his listeners to ponder
the generosity,
the patience,
the grace of the gardener.
They are struck by the words of the gardener
when he says "Leave it alone".
The word used by Jesus here
also means "forgive".
They know now that Jesus
wasn't simply telling a story about a fig tree
but he was talking about God
and the way God forgives us
even though we don't deserve
such generosity and kindness.

You see, God has given us some wonderful soil for growth.
In Colossians chapter 2 we are told,
*"You have accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord.
Now keep on following him.
Plant your roots in Christ
and let him be the foundation for your life.
Be strong in your faith,
just as you were taught.
And be grateful".*
As God's people we build our lives on Jesus.
Our very existence,
our day-to-day living,
our every breathing moment has its source in him.

We occupy valuable space in the garden.
The soil is rich and our roots are there
and the owner of the garden is looking for fruit.
God wants to see in us
the kind of fruit that he would expect to see
from someone who has been made new and holy
through the blood of Jesus;
from someone who has been given a new life
by the living Jesus.

Jesus sees all too well
what has happened in the past –
how our relationships haven't always been
what they could have been.

He has seen the arguments,
the inability to be generous
when it comes to forgiveness and reconciliation,
the lack of gratitude to your parents,
the disrespect for your children,
the disconnection between you and the church
and what God offers through his church.

Jesus has seen it all much to our embarrassment.
And he's forgiven it all.
And we've drawn on that forgiveness.
We've heard his words every Sunday
as he says to us, 'Your sins are forgiven!'

We've been assured of that each time
we've come to the Lord's Supper.

We've drawn on those riches,
and still there's someone we haven't forgiven.

Still there is that relationship that remains fractured,
still no words are spoken between you
and the person with whom you have fallen out,
still the anger wells up whenever you think of that person
or hear his/her name.

What magnificent love God shows us!
God really must think we're something special.
What love . . .
that God takes me and adopts me and calls me his child.
That love of God is so precious to us

especially when we have cried out in despair and pain
and need the reassurance that everything will be all right!

"Give the tree one more year",
the gardener in the vineyard said.
The owner wanted to chop it down
but the gardener isn't going to give up.
He's going to dig around it,
turn over the soil,
add some fertilizer,
show it some more TLC
and give it another chance!
Isn't that just typical of the Spirit of God?
The soil may be brown and hard-baked,
but he's going to send rain.
There's going to be a change.
The gardener is determined
and he's going to see to it!

Listen to what Jesus tell us in John,
*"Those who remain in me,
and I in them,
will bear much fruit;
for you can do nothing without me"*.
The key is to be connected to Jesus.
He is the one who can enable us to be what we ought to be.
We need him to help our branches bear fruit.
Without him, we will rate each year that passes
Below a 5 on the 1 to 10 scale!

My friends, Jesus gives himself for us.
He becomes the fertilizer for us
as he is rejected,
laughed at,
crucified as a criminal.
On the cross,
nails,
thorn-spikes
and spear dig into him.
He waters the ground with his own blood.
He does everything.
We do nothing.
We simply trust in his grace.
In Christ, we are made beautiful, fruitful gardens.

He digs around so that the love of God

pours out of us
and begins to work in us
and we become lovely people,
through Jesus!
With his kind of fertilizer
we begin to accept others
as he was able to accept others ... and us.

The parable about the fig tree makes it quite clear
that we have been unfruitful,
unfaithful,
yet in spite of our lack of fidelity,
God is faithful.

Be sure of this:
Jesus waits for us,
spade in hand,
wheelbarrow by his side,
ready to bring us new life.
That's a promise.
Armed with that promise,
we can step forward into the rest of 2010
ready to let him do the work in us that only he can do.
Thank him for his goodness in giving you,
giving us, another year of grace!

*Will you pray with me?
Lord you have given us another year of grace.
Help us to use it to put forth fruit in our lives . . .
In our relationships . . .
In all that we do.
Amen.*