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SERMON TITLE: The Fruitless Fig Tree  
SCRIPTURE: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25  
DATE: April 3, 2022

Online service at [www.fpcd.org/live-stream](http://www.fpcd.org/live-stream)

Read also Isaiah 55:6-13.

Hear the Word of the Lord: READ Mark 11:12-14

The next morning as [Jesus and the disciples] were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He noticed a fig tree in full leaf a little way off, so he went over to see if he could find any figs. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard him say it.

The other day I went outside and looked around my yard. I examined the flower beds in the front and saw the indented holes left by the shrubs that died last year and were never replaced. With no plants, the soil had washed, leaving barren ground and raised flagstone on the front patio.

I headed around back and chopped away the dead remains from one of the tall grasses in the backyard. Then I raked the lawn, which was filled with dead grass. I clipped off dead stalks from two other perennials which were not showing life.

As I prepared for this sermon, I wondered had the Lord cursed my yard?

The fig tree was in full bloom when Jesus noticed it. Unfortunately for it, it had no early fruit. Fig trees produce a harvest twice a year in Israel. When the fall fig harvest ends, the branches sprout buds that remain undeveloped all winter and then, right after the leaf buds in April, the buds swell and are excellent to eat. So it could have had some food for him!

Fig trees were a sign of wealth and prosperity in Israel. Here's what the prophet Hosea said:

"When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree." (9:10)

Jesus expected to find a bounty of this early fruit on the fig tree but found nothing. So, he cursed it. His Word was powerful! Listen:

The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up. Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!" Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the

sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours. But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too." (Mark 11:20-25)

This is an extraordinary story! Was it a fit of anger? Was it vengeful? What are we to think? I pondered this an entire day. How do we interpret it? Finally in the middle of the night I came to a conclusion. I am going to speak about three different angles. You can choose which speaks to you.

1. Power-filled Faith
2. Parable about the Temple
3. The Principle of Forgiveness

#### Power-filled Faith

Did Jesus lose patience because he was hungry? The tree was not producing and he takes action to put it out of its misery. While I spent last weekend doing exactly that in my own yard, we cannot know his feelings. But what we do see is POWER.

The tree was not producing, and so he "judged" it. Pardon me for using such a harsh word, but think of the Texas State Fair and its exhibits of animals, creative arts, and food. All of those categories are judged with the result that there are winners and losers. Jesus' tree was a loser.

Jesus did not explain why he cursed the tree. He talked about the power that was released with his words, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" He said, you can do this too if you have faith! Well, we can certainly have faith but we don't have ability.

There are examples in the Bible of people who were given God's power:

- ✓ Abraham and Sarah were infertile—in faith they persisted and had a child through God's power;
- ✓ Joseph had dreams of being a ruler but was the youngest and most despised member of his family—he became Egypt's top ruler, second only to Pharaoh, through God's power;
- ✓ Moses was a humble man whom God called to lead God's people from Egypt to Israel. He talked to God and received food, water, and defeated Egypt's strong army—through God's power;
- ✓ Elijah experienced victories that were against all odds because he gave his life to God. In faith he took risks—and God powerfully ignited Elijah's water-soaked altar with fire in front of the Baal priests.

All these people had setbacks where they acted in their own power. They got discouraged, depressed, experienced hardship, and felt alone and hated. Nevertheless, God came through in power.

Jesus commanded the curse on the fig tree and it withered. What do we learn? *That Jesus is willing to share his power with us.* We can have confidence that he can break the power of the enemy, even if the enemy is us. His Words are activated by faith. That means turning to him and trusting that Jesus can and will act. Notice Jesus' words:

A boy had a condition like epilepsy: Jesus said, "**I command you to come out** of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him (Mk 9:25-26).

The centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only **speak the word, and my servant will be healed**.... Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour. (Mt 8:8, 13)

When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; **he touched her hand**, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him (Mt 8:14-15)

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he **cast out the spirits with a word**, curing all who were sick. (Mt 8:16)

When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and **spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured**. (Lk 9:11)

The Fruitless Fig Tree story demonstrates the power of Jesus. When you pray, are you realizing his great power? Don't let your doubt overcome you, though it tries! Acknowledge his power!

### Parable about the Temple

The second angle looks at the Fruitless Fig Tree as a parable.

Jesus was on the way to the temple when he cursed the fig tree. Next, he went into the temple and began overthrowing the merchandizers and system of sacrifices. He utterly stopped the sacrifices for the day—possibly more! And no one stopped him. Next, the story returns to the tree which was now dead. It is a sandwich parable—barren fig tree; cleansing of the temple; dead fig tree.

Jesus upset the entire system and what it had become.

Today I will lead The Lord's Supper. It is called that because Jesus initiated it. In it I will quote Jesus' words: "This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood." Covenant (διαθήκη) means "last will and testament." Once it is ratified, no one can change someone's will, except that person.

The original covenant of that God would make a nation from one man was a promise made by God to Abraham. Paul explains

this promise was actually actuated by Christ. Jesus inherits this great mass of people. In the meantime, until Christ came, God set up the law and sacrificial system to take care of the problem of sin." The sacrifices temporarily help people receive forgiveness and live for God until Jesus came. Jesus then became the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins.

The temple and all it represents was temporary until Jesus came. It was destroyed after Jesus died for us. Then, the temple is in you, when you receive his forgiveness through faith in Him. The temple was destroyed a few years later (A.D. 70) and has never been rebuilt.

### The Principle of Forgiveness

The third angle of the fig tree picks up on this verse:

"But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too" (11:25).

Everything that has to do with faith in God and faith in Jesus revolves around forgiveness of sins. **God is a forgiving God.** When God forgives—and God has a lot to forgive in every one of us—God forgets our sins. God cast them behind God's back forever. (Isaiah 38:17) There is no sin that is not forgiven, except one. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

The reason is, the Holy Spirit is "Christ in you." He lives in your heart. The Holy Spirit activates your faith. A theologian says, "It is God's divine prerogative to forgive." It is not our decision to make; it is God's privilege and entitlement, and God freely forgives. We are to do likewise.

*Have you received God's forgiveness? Do you live in it? I invite you to do so.*

The story of the fruitless fig tree, small and mysterious as it is, has some of the greatest meaning of the Gospel. Consider its lessons today. Embrace that little tree and its message to you. Jesus loves you.

AMEN