

## **Nurture – March 3, 2010**

**Isaiah 55:1-9; Luke 13:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8 3-07-2010**

I have a kind and generous friend who is fond of quoting Thornton Wilder, who said, “Money is like manure. It should be spread around.” From my observations of life, I think he is right.

We all would like to have an abundant supply of money to provide us with all the good things in life. But, there comes a time when we need to ask ourselves just how much we actually need. When we begin to ask this question, we often discover that we have some spare dollars that we can share with a favorite charity or good cause or with someone else who needs it. When we begin to dole out the dollars we choose to share, we find out just how much we are able to nurture projects, institutions and people and make things grow.

Our parable for this morning is all about spreading around a little manure to make things grow and flourish. It helps provide nurture for new growth and strength.

As we all remember, Jesus spoke and taught in parables a great deal. A parable is an “earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Parables were used as simple illustrations to help people understand what it was God wanted of them.

A fig tree figures into some of the parables of Jesus. It’s usually a wayward fig tree that is not producing any fruit when it is supposed to. Quite often the remedy for this problem was to cut down the tree and toss it into the fire where it might do some good.

A fig tree, also, was often used as a metaphor for the nation Israel. Jesus, according to prophecy, had been sent to rescue the children of Israel who had turned aside from God. Israel was not producing good fruit so God thought it should be cut down. The wise gardener asked for a bit of time to see just what might happen if the nation was nurtured a bit. Perhaps, things would turn around. If they did not there was always time to cut that nation down.

If we consider the tree to be a person instead of the nation, the metaphor becomes a strong one—if we are not using our lives to the fullest extent and being productive, we might as well be dead. But, there is always hope that, in time, things will turn out right.

There are times in our lives when we do not have the patience we need to have with people and with special projects. We tend to prefer immediate gratification over the challenge of following a long and winding road. There are times when seeing something come fully into flower in a brief time is very good for us. It is a relief. But, most often, we discover that things just take time to develop and bring us a sense of reward and well-being. Raising a child, training a puppy, growing a tomato from a seed, establishing a relationship or a marriage, learning a special skill, helping a group grow into an operating, unified body—all these efforts require a lot of patience and a lot of nurture.

When we decide to make a commitment to nurture and support a project or a person, we make a promise, spoken or unspoken, to do so. We make a covenant, in the tradition of our faith, that we will stick to our promise through thick and through thin, through times of growth and times of decline. If our particular fig tree shows signs of life and offers forth a few pieces of fruit after a time of faithful nurture, we will continue to help it

grow into all it can become. By doing this, we turn around and share the promise of God. That promise that tells us, once again, through the prophet Isaiah, that we will always be loved and sustained no matter how close we might come to devastation and desolation. No matter how many times we may stand on the brink of life, we will be nurtured back into wholeness once again by our God, even when we turn away from the God who cares for us.

During this season of Lent and during our times of reflection, we need to re-commit ourselves to nurturing those things and people in our lives that are of great value. They are all around us waiting for us to open our eyes that we might see where our efforts are needed. When we discover where it is we can nurture the best, we need to renew our covenants to be the sustainers and protectors of all things bright and beautiful and all things worthwhile.

Amen