

## “The Fig Tree”

Luke 13:6-9; Song of Solomon 2:8-13; 7-06-08

*There are many different ways to interpret scripture. As Congregationalists, we accept that the person sitting beside us might view a particular reading in a way we have never thought of viewing it. This morning we are going to look at an interpretation of the parable of the fig tree that adds a dimension to this little story we might never have thought of. Once again I turn to Edward Hays' little book, The Ethiopian Tattoo Shop.*

### The Fig Tree

For several years the young fig tree had been without fruit. She had drunk fully of the rain, soaked up the warm rays of the sun, and absorbed her share of goodness from the earth, but yet no fruit had been found on her branches. The owner of the orchard had no patience for what he considered parasites. “Cut her down!” he ordered the gardener.

“Please, sir, said the gardener, please give her just one more year. Allow me to nurture her and to challenge her. One more year, and then if she is still barren well...I will have her cut down.”

Shaking his head and mumbling to himself, the owner agreed as he walked away from the gardener saying, “One more year, but that’s all—one more year.”

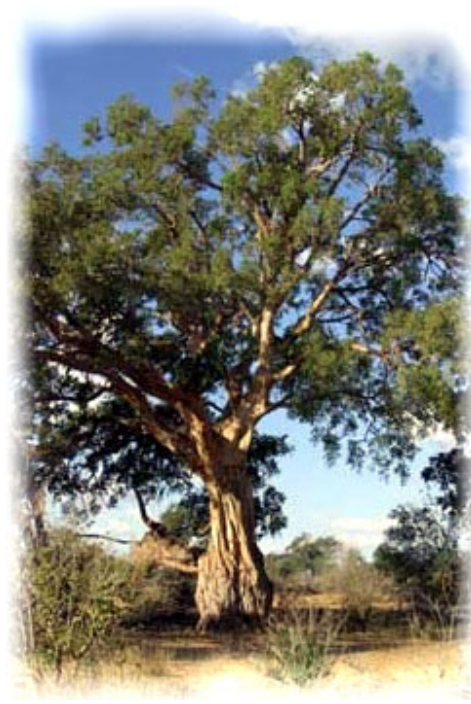
The gardener began by putting manure around the tree. The fig tree pretended not to notice and only raised her head higher in the sky. He then dug about the tree with his shovel, and as he did he spoke to the tree, “Everyone and everything that lives has a vocation. It’s the calling to be yourself.”

The fig tree said nothing but only sighed inwardly. “Who wants to be themselves if they’re only a fig tree!” she thought to herself. The fig tree, you see, thought that fig trees were too common. She had tried to be an apple tree for years, but no apples appeared on her branches. She even went to college and took all the courses necessary to become a pear tree, but no pears appeared. So she then resorted to taking a home correspondence course entitled, “How to be a Banana Tree.” From this and all her other efforts only frustration and the fruits of failure grew on her.

“I need to find a job that I can enjoy,” said the fig tree.

“A job and a vocation,” replies the gardener “are two very different things, my dear fig tree. A vocation has about it a sense of mystery, but a job is like a task—it is something to be done and not lived! A vocation comes from your very roots—from deep down in the dark depths of yourself. And you have Fig Tree roots.”

“No thanks,” said the fig tree, “I prefer to be more novel. I think I’ll go over to the laboratory and have them ‘cross-gene’ me; you know, have them perform a graft with some other tree so that I can be really special. Who knows, perhaps I can become a



‘banapple tree.’ Think of the news coverage, not to mention the demand for my fruit, if they could shake up my genes like that.”

The gardener shook his head and stopped digging as he said, “there is something most special about you even now, little tree. You can be creative in the truest way by living out the mystery of your figtreeness.” You then become not only something special but also something sacred! By responding to the challenge to become yourself you will find yourself in the presence of the real mystery—God. However, both life and God will escape you if you attempt to be what you are not intended to be. And, remember, you only have one more year—for the master said he was going to have you chopped down if you do not bear fruit this year. “

“I wish I could run away,” said the fig tree. “Oh, to have the gift of locomotion like dogs and cats. There’s an idea: I could become a traveling tree. I would need special roots that could stand the wear and tear of walking and still be able to still sink deep into the soil when it is dinnertime. But where would I go to learn such a trick?”

“No, fig tree,” interrupted the gardener, “forget about being novel—about being a ‘one and only’ kind of tree—and be creative. I know...I know for sure that if you would only listen to what’s in your roots you would be the most special, the most creative and lovely tree in all the world.”

“Listen to my roots?”, asked the fig tree. “What’s down there?”

“Your dreams are there,” said the gardener, “and your history, your passions and desires and other dark mysteries.”