



weekend

resource guide

for the week of 29 October

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15.1-5)

There are certain passages of Scripture that are guaranteed to quell the “devotional schemes” of men and women of God. These passages are intrusions into our spiritual comfort zones. They unsettle us with their observations and convict us by their bluntness. It is not that such passages are intended to condemn us as much as they reflect the truth that we arrange our lives to avoid facing.

In this passage Jesus tells us very clearly that:

He is the true vine;
Our Father is the gardener;
We are branches that are intended to bear much fruit.

So far so good... He then goes on to say:

Some branches will be cared for because they do not bear any fruit;
Some branches will be cut so they can bear even more fruit.

This is upside down. The unfruitful will be “lifted up” — a common practice where the branch is lifted off the ground, cleaned, and carefully repositioned off the ground giving it a fresh start. But the fruitful will be cut! The unfruitful get tender care while the fruitful get “butchered”! Is this any way to treat your most productive people?!

Jesus uses the parable of the vine to describe the reality of Christian growth and the way that God prepares a disciple to be useful to His work in the world today. Jesus is here speaking of two conditions. The first is the presence of branches that are dead or diseased and whose continuing presence will threaten its own viability for future growth and production. These branches cannot be left in their current and unfruitful condition. They must be cared for if your goal is fruitfulness. Sin, when exposed or recognized, cannot be tolerated and flirted with. What our culture calls normal the Lord frequently calls sin. It must be decisively addressed through repentance, the acceptance of God’s grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit to repudiate its attraction and to renounce its power. Diseased branches cannot be ignored if the goal is to maintain the health and productive capability of the plant.

The second condition, Jesus describes, is a fruitful branch that is pruned back. The gardener prunes a branch in order to force it to rest. This forced dormancy is necessary because without it the plant will keep attempting to grow and will exhaust itself over the long run. Thus, there will never be, from the perspective of a fruitful branch, a good time to be pruned. Pruning will always be problematic because you cannot be pruned and be fruitful at the same time. Pruning is always painful, intrusive, and inconvenient because the ambition to grow and be fruitful will not naturally curtail itself. That is why we need the Gardener.

Different plants will be cared for in different ways. Some fruit trees are pruned very slightly because they bear their fruit on old wood (experience?) while others are pruned quite severely because they must bear their fruit on new wood (repentance?). Yet we can rest confident in knowing that we have a good Gardener who knows how to care and grow up every plant.

Men and women of God, if you want to bear much fruit then the Gardener must have the freedom to cut, trim, shape, redirect, and feed you.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better...

Describe a place you've visited that gave you a sense of excitement. Why did it affect you that way?

Mark 11.1-25: The Gospel King: His entry, His fig tree, His temple, and His thoughts on prayer

As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, 2 and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." 4 They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. 5 Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. 7 They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. 8 And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. 9 Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting:

*"Hosanna!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David;
Hosanna in the highest!"*

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.

12 On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. 13 Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den." 18 The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

19 When evening came, they would go out of the city.

20 As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. 21 Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." 22 And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. 24 Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. 25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

What? (does the Bible say)

What do Zechariah 9:9-10 and 14:4 indicate Jesus is saying about himself?

How does the reaction of the people confirm that they understand Jesus' symbolic message?

Now what? (should/will I think based on what this passage says)

What do you think the disciples thought about what Jesus asked them to do (11.2-3)?

When has God told you to do something that you thought was unusual or difficult to justify?

Why do you suppose Mark has sandwiched this account of Jesus' clearing out of the temple within that of the cursing of the fig tree?

Background: When Jesus entered the temple, he probably came into the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the whole complex where non-Jews were allowed to enter and worship. But worship had become impossible here because this space created for worship and prayer had been turned into a typical bazaar area, with buyers and sellers and stalls everywhere. Birds and animals for sacrifice were sold there, and foreign money could be changed into the only currency accepted in the temple, one without the hated figures of Roman emperors and heathen gods. In one sense, all this was a service to the worshippers, but the noise and bustle made worship impossible. To make matters worse, this court was used as a shortcut by merchants bringing goods from the Mount of Olives to the city itself.

What does Jesus' anger in the Temple teach us about the heart of God for people? (Mark 11:15-17)?

How do you react to Jesus' anger?

Many people believe they will escape the judgment of God simply because they are religious. How can this passage serve as a warning to them and to us?

The Temple was a place/space set aside for worship and prayer — something that God valued. Do you think God still desires for us to have buildings set aside for worship and prayer? Why or why not?

Jesus uses the occasion of Peter's observation of the fig tree to teach on prayer. Why are the themes of fruitfulness and forgiveness so important to Jesus?

So what? (difference will this passage make in how I live)

You don't spread cloaks on the road for friends or even for family—especially in the Middle East, dusty and stony as it was. But you do it for royalty. How does Jesus' kingship call us to put our property at his disposal?

The fig tree had leaves but no fruit; what is one area of your life that looks good, but isn't producing what God wants?

How can you grow and become more productive in one of your less fruitful areas?

Sometimes we grow discouraged and lose any aspiration for fruitfulness. We settle for the emptiness of the status quo. Are there any areas that you have given up your hope for fruitfulness?

Jesus links unfruitfulness with unforgiveness (11.21-25). Are there any people you need to forgive?

How can your LifeGroup encourage and empower you to be fruitful?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...