

Matthew 21:18-22

Food for Thought

March 8, 2020 – Rev. Rick Lyon

Intro -

Matthew 21:18 - Now in the morning, as Jesus returned to the city, He was *hungry*. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found *nothing* on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away.

Kent Hughes: "If the fig tree continued to be barren and useless, it'd be cut down for firewood... Jesus withered the tree to teach an eternal spiritual lesson... Jesus honored that tree, making it the most useful tree that ever grew! It was and is a tree from which thousands have learned about themselves and turned back to God."

1. A Lesson in Fruitfulness

John 15:8 - "By this My Father is glorified, that you *bear much fruit*."

Galatians 5:22-23 - The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

John 15:1-5 - "I'm the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. Every branch in Me that doesn't bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... No branch can bear fruit by itself... If you abide in Me and I in you, you'll bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

2. A Lesson in Faith

v.19 - Immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither away so soon?” So Jesus answered

Matthew 21:18-22

Food for Thought

March 8, 2020 – Rev. Rick Lyon

and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have *faith* and don't doubt, you'll not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”

Zechariah 4:7 - "What are you, mighty *mountain*? Before Zerubbabel you'll become level ground."

He calls on us to **PRAY UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS--PUSH!**

Jesus said: "Have *faith* and *don't doubt*... Whatever you ask in prayer *believing*, you'll receive."

James 1:6-7 – Ask in faith, with no doubting, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. That person shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Acts 12:14-15 - When Rhoda recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, “Peter is standing at the door!”

3. A Lesson in Forgiveness.

Mark 11:25-26 - "Whenever you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you don't forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Mark 11:5-6 - As the disciples were untying the donkey, some people asked, “Why are you untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people *let them go*.

Matthew 21:18-22

Food for Thought

March 8, 2020 – Rev. Rick Lyon

To “forgive” means to “let go.”

- **They had a right to hold onto that donkey.**
- **That donkey belonged to them.**
- **But they let it go.**

Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie were arrested and sent to a concentration camp during World War 2 for concealing Jews in their home during the Nazi occupation of Holland.

She wrote: It was in a church in Munich that I saw him – a balding, heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I'd just spoken. It was 1947 and I'd just come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. *“When we confess our sins,” I said, “God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And even though I can’t find a scripture for it, I believe God then places a sign out there that says NO FISHING ALLOWED.”*

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, collected their coats and left the room. And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: The place was Ravensbruck and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard – one of the cruelest guards.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: *“A fine message Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”*

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He wouldn't remember me, of course – how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,” he said. “I was a guard there. But since that time, I’ve become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I’d like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,” again the hand came out - *“will you forgive me?”*

Matthew 21:18-22

Food for Thought

March 8, 2020 – Rev. Rick Lyon

And I stood there – I whose sins had again and again needed to be forgiven – and couldn't forgive. Betsy had died in that place – could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It couldn't have been many seconds that he stood there – hand held out – but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I ever had to do. For I had to do it – I knew that. The message that God forgives has a condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. *“If you don't forgive men their trespasses,”* Jesus says, *“neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses.”*

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I'd had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness isn't an emotion. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. *“Jesus help me!”* I prayed silently. *“I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”*

And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother” I cried. *“With all my heart.”*

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I'd never known God's love so intensely, as I did then. But even so, I realized it wasn't my love. I'd tried, and didn't have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion – *When God looks at your life today, what does He see?*

- *Does He see a fruitful life?*
- **A life that's producing something for God's glory.**
- **A life that's producing something of eternal value**
- *Does He see faithful prayer?*
- **Prayer that trusts in His power and goodness**
- *And does He see a forgiving spirit?*