

Give Us Grace to Look

Luke 6:6-9 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Fig trees have a purpose-to bear fruit. Many trees are not fruit trees and so do not have that purpose stamped on their existence. The Christian Church, the body of Christ, has a purpose-to bear fruit as is plainly stated in John 15. As a branch growing out of the vine, as people growing out of Christ, Christians are to bear fruit, to abide in Christ, to bear the fruit of love and joy. If a Christian is fruitless like a barren branch, then why not throw this branch into the fire?

What about the terrorist attacks and the effects they are having on our whole country? What is our country's response and our individual response and yes, the response of the Christian Church? If we need a point of reference, this passage in Luke and also the verses preceding it in 13:1-5 seem to be a good place to start. Jesus is not asking us to blame ourselves but to take stock and look at where we see reason to repent before God. Are there sterile places where no fruit is growing? Are there weeds of the pleasures and cares of life which have choked out the vitality of Christ in us? What do our neighbors and our own relatives think of our attitudes?

We Christians often forget how we come across to those around us. We become so full of ourselves and how we are performing inside our churches, we forget how others may be viewing us. When the New Testament lists the qualifications for a bishop, one is that he may be well thought of by outsiders. (I Timothy 3:7a). Jesus told his disciples, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Gandhi told E. Stanley Jones that Christianity is a religion of love and Christians should live out what their leader taught them.

Jesus is asking us to look at whether our fig tree is fruitful. One place we know from Matthew 18 that Jesus would have us look is to our children. Are we loving and caring for our children in a responsible way? Will they be stable and equipped to be parents and leaders in the next generation? Are we allowing them to be swept away by messages from people who only seek to make money off them and do not care about the outcomes they cause? Are we neglecting them?

On September 10, 2001-the day before the terrorists' attacks, the University of Pennsylvania came out with a research study. They showed between 300,000 and 400,000 juveniles in the United States were being used in prostitution. If we say 6,000 people were killed in the terrorists attacks and use the low figure of 300,000 children caught in being sex objects that would mean for every person killed, 50 children are being sexually assaulted on a daily basis in this country. For every dead body, 50 children are going through the life changing horror of being someone else's piece of meat. Are we noticing this? Are we talking about this? Are we pulling our heads out of the sand and facing the issues of child sexual abuse and the use of young people for someone else's sexual pleasure or perhaps our own? Is anyone repenting of what is going on? How much are we involved in the lives of at risk young people in our own communities? How long will God be patient with America's lack of concern for her children?

Jesus, we just want to not have to look. Give us grace to look, to repent, to love children. Amen.