

Good Enough: Embracing the Imperfections of Life and Faith
“Lots of Things Can Be Medicine”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
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Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him (Jesus) about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

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.’”

It is interesting that today in our scripture in the Gospel of Luke we find these two stories linked together. At first glance one would ask why are they connected?

So to help with unpacking this, we are going to dissect it and actually start with the second part where Jesus responds to his followers with a parable. Jesus begins with the owner of the vineyard who is a smart businessman. He knows that it is important to watch his plants to know which one is producing fruit and which one is not. Productivity means money. If something is not producing and not meeting its full potential, then it is cutting into his profit. It is not worth keeping.

The owner has brought his knowledgeable gardener with him. He begins to make the argument that he has given the fig tree three years to produce fruit. It is wasting soil! Cut it down and get rid of it! But the gardener wants to give it more time. He urges the owner to let him nurture and care for the tree. The gardener sees worth and potential in the tree. It should be saved because in time and with care it will produce again.

How many times in our lives do we not feel worthy? Do you ever ask yourself was I productive today? Am I living up to my fullest potential?

We are so driven by making sure we are worthy that sometimes we spin our wheels to keep our job. There is an expectation that we have to meet certain productivity rates and if we can't fix it then we are failures. We can find self-help books on helping us find our full potential. How many of us make “To Do Lists” and we don't feel productive until we have checked everything off by the end of the day? This can be exhausting! Everything going on in our world today can make even the healthiest person weary.

This is looking just at ourselves. What if we start looking at others and their worth? It can be downright dangerous! Dr. Marcia McFee, the creator of the worship design studio

which is the mastermind behind this Lenten series, says *"If we cannot accept our own worthiness we are in danger of extending that dissatisfaction and even hatred to others."* (Marcia McFee © www.worshipdesignstudio.com/goodenough). This is what is going on in the Ukraine right now, isn't it? War can be the result of fighting against injustice but it can also be about power and greed. When the question of someone else's worth comes into play, the very existence of life is threatened!

The first part of our scripture, Jesus asks his followers about two horrible situations where lives were destroyed and the relation these had to sin. Pilate sent his armies in to kill the Galileans while they were making their sacrifices to God. Why did this happen to them and not the other Galileans? Was their sin worse than the others? "NO!" says Jesus. A tower collapsed and fell on some people in Jerusalem. Was their sin worse than the others? "NO!" says Jesus. Catastrophes, accidents and violent acts have nothing to do with sin. But there is always a need to repent and change what you are doing to live by the will of God.

It is no wonder that the Gospel of Luke has been referred to as the "Great Physician." The medicine that Gospel prescribes is in Jesus ending the parable with the gardener. It is a breath of fresh air that Jesus comes along and gives us the urging of the gardener, who says, "What a minute!"

What if we looked at our lives like the gardener? We take time to tend our soil finding what we need to enrich our lives. Working the ground around us, we make sure we fertilize and water giving care especially when we are broken. If we are not living up to our fullest potential, we must be patient with ourselves to seek what is causing it. It would not only be important to do this for ourselves but our neighbor as well. Where can we find the medicine to produce again and be satisfied that it is good enough?

On one of Kate Bowler's (the co-author of our Lenten devotional book "Good Enough") podcast, she interviews Nora McInerny, who in a six week period of time in 2014 had a miscarriage in her second trimester, lost her dad and her husband to brain cancer, leaving being a two year old son. She speaks of moving on in her life and straddling sadness of the past and the joy of the present. She didn't think she should be aloud to find joy again especially in her grief. She felt guilty for finding another man to love and carry his child, when she still loved her dead husband. Giving herself permission to laugh and love again was medicine for her soul. She realized the importance to reach out to others who was feeling the exact same pain she was feeling and tell them that it is okay to have joy and pain.

The other medicine that I prescribe to you this week is doing some acts of kindness. More specifically, I urge you to give kindness to a stranger. Statistics show that doing an act of kindness can be just as rewarding as receiving that act of kindness. It can change a person's life. Kate Bowler shares in her devotion, *"Kindness is restorative act done for the good of another, handing over something valuable without the expectation of return. And yet, it does offer something. There is this unexpected boomerang effect. The day gets better – not always easier, definitely not perfect, but a bit sweeter. We remember that no matter what is happening in our own lives, in our own orbits, we have the capacity to add a little goodness to the world."* (Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection; Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie; Convergent Books; 2022; p. 142)

God's mercy is great. It is like the gardener that knows we may need time to be nurtured so we can thrive. That our production and potential is good enough.

As the rubble of 9/11 was cleared away, the workers found the remains of a Callery pear tree. These trees were used as decorative landscape lining the sidewalks before the Twin Towers fell. You can see what the workers found in the picture once they pulled it out from between two slabs of cement. It was a heap of gnarled roots, broken and burnt stump and branches. The workers realized that one branch still had some green leaves attached showing some form of life. At first one would think why on earth would they want to try to save this tree. It would be better off just throwing it in the dump truck along with all the other mountains of debris.

Yet, the parks department thought it **was worth taking the time to try and save it**. After years of caring for the tree by watering, fertilizing and pruning it, this tree became to be known as the survivor tree. It was the last living survivor rescued from that devastating event. Once it was healthy enough to move, it was replanted in the plaza of the 9-11 Museum and Memorial. Its scarred trunk and branches connect to the smooth new growth with beautiful white blossoms in the spring, green leaves in the summer and seeds that are spread by the birds, giving all who stand in its shade hope!

Thanks be to Jesus Christ, who gives us stories that renew our soul because we are good enough! Amen.

Pictures of the survivor tree:

