

### Bearing Fruits



There is a Horticultural theme in today's Gospel reading, and many here know more about this than me who approaches the garden always with trepidation!

Plants, earth, manure - it all sounds rather messy to a townie like me. I was brought up with a back yard, literally flagstones, not in any way a garden and I am well-known in my family as someone who doesn't even like getting his wellies wet or dirty, let alone my shoes!

A Fig tree features today and a rather patient gardener. No rush, but eventually, a decision needs to be made. In the end if it doesn't bear fruit, then it will have to go since that is its work, that is its purpose in life.

The withered fig tree by Ian Pollock

In its original context, this is a parable against the Jewish authorities of Jesus' day, warning them that they were about to be supplanted by another people who would hear the voice and God and respond with good fruits.

In our context, this parable has a personal impact, and an impact which is a visible rebuke to every individual and to the whole church universal. It is about our apparent complacency in our spiritual and personal development and in our lack of progress in being the united church of God.

We seem willing to wait a very long time for fruits.

We seem patient of our own lack of progress. So patient that its possible we may wait for ever, without demanding any fruit from our own lives.

As Christians, we are all seemingly happy to drift along, with the divisions of the churches plainly visible and even the angry and bitter disagreements still simmering away between us.

This evidence of what we do is far more informative than what we say.

How can we as Christian people teach the world about God's love, justice, peace, mercy, generosity, forgiveness and renewing power when we still bear the marks of hatred, injustice, conflict, failures to forgive and self-destruction?

In the wider world, onlookers are quite right to question the authenticity of our message when we address the world with the Christian message. They quite rightly and simply say:

"Physician, heal thyself."

Religion, including Christianity of course, is seen by increasing numbers of people as a part of the problems of the world, not a part of the solution. For that, we have ourselves to blame in so many ways. Whilst many people want there to be something for them in religions, they are also see the point of those who seek to identify religion as essentially causing wars and conflict.

The ability to get on with things without making progress in bearing fruit is deeply disappointing and even sinful. It is a denial of God's power to heal because we don't want to know enough about it to make it a reality.

Well, we must never give up. That too is a denial of God's renewing power.

Let us pray for good fruits in our own lives, and in the life of the people who try to promote God's love in this dangerous world of ours. I mean good fruit which pleases God and which enhances the lives of all involved, and which in the end promotes God simply because of the actual difference it makes to the lives of ordinary people, rather than because of what we say about it.

We are in the business of promoting life in its full abundance. How can we do this from the position of internal conflict and broken relationships?

We may not be able to do anything about the church universal, but we can start at home, and make efforts to ensure that we are reconciled to each other and ministers of reconciliation in our community.