

“GOD MOVES OVER THE FENCE”

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1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9

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So these are positive passages that we have read today.

I wrote that line at the very beginning because I felt I would need to justify it in my sermon later. Because you know, I bet we could find another religion where we could go where the fig tree was not cut down. Because I bet you, we could find a better title somewhere, even better than Repent or Perish. I bet we could find something, nicer, kinder, more in line with our personal taste that and if we want it if we just look at others and how they live their lives, we can find something better.

I mean, we have an expression for it; the grass is always greener on the other side. Or, as Richard A. Whiting said it, "The Grass is Always Greener in the Other Fellow's Yard." When we are looking over our fence at others, we really notice their differences.

Now this turn of phrase is an idiom, a way of saying something with deeper meaning than what the words mean individually. It is used when someone is not satisfied with their own life and always assumes that there are better things in other places. That some other fellow has it better than you do because their grass is greener.

It is an expression that captures the human quality of always wanting something different than what you have. It assumes that your neighbour's yard is greener than yours, that theirs is better than yours. When, in reality, they are the same, or your neighbour is statistically coveting something you have and take for granted.

The grass being greener on the other side in an expression built on human longing. It shows how we build a fantasy that if we only changed one small thing, like the side of the fence, everything would be better. However, the phrase is often used in the context of reminding people that this is not usually the case.

So let's look again at the passage we read this morning:

6 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. 7 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?' 8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

So my question to you is this, how do you know if your fig tree is no good and needs to be cut down if you have no one else to compare it to?

I typed this as a hypothetical question, not expecting any response.

You don't, really. You need a point of comparison to calling something a failure. To say it is not bearing appropriate fruits. You need a standard, and we tend to find that standard by comparing ourselves to our neighbours.

But do we really? What about the fact that you don't need more fig trees as comparisons to judge whether a particular fig tree needs to be cut down or not, it either bears figs or doesn't. maybe the point isn't just comparing ourselves with others, but to consider whether we are doing what we're supposed to be doing as God's creations.

God made us, God gave us great gifts and God gave the Holy Spirit the ability to hear a calling to live a life of Love of neighbour. We can hear the whispers sometimes best in prayer.

If I was being metaphorical, I could potentially argue that our own lives are the fig tree. Our lives where we are not good enough. Our lives where we fall short. Our lives where we are not as impressive as the people around us.

Take a moment and recognize how you think some of the seat neighbours you have grown more fruit in areas of their lives where you have not. Maybe you are sitting by the minister thinking he has fruits grown in the area of articulating faith. Maybe you are by someone who is a great organizer or had the family you wanted. Maybe you are beside someone who made brave decisions you are in awe of. Maybe you are beside someone who you see a strength in that they do not even recognize.

Now there is nothing wrong with recognizing a strength, and if you want to share the strengths you see in others at much and mingle, I fully support it.

Yet Jesus is the master of pulling people back over the fence to their yard to look deeper and connect with nature and our natural gifts even more.

Jesus has challenged our idea of neighbour to have it include people we would not normally include. Our neighbours have gone from those who are rich enough to have a house beside us to the injured enemy on the road who fell injured. Our neighbours live in the suburbs next to us and above our socioeconomic status.

Jesus has challenged groups from judging others to looking inward and working on their own sins first- or our own struggles.

Jesus has challenged others to not let people think that bad things only happen to bad people.

Jesus has challenged us to look deeper into the heart of the issues. To look deeper into our own hearts. The scary and beautiful new is that God made us for a reason. God graced us all with beautiful talents, skills and callings. Not one of us was made the same and that is beautiful. We do not need to compare ourselves to others, but to what God desires for us.

Yet we don't always do that.

Sometimes we forget or discard what God has called us to do because we think we can do it better. We think we can be better. Because look at the amazing things our neighbours are doing. And we stumbled. So we turn and walk away from that path.

Things not working out the way you planned does not make you lesser. Not having the same strengths as others does not make you weak. Not looking the way you think is ideal does not make you look any less beautiful. Not having the certificates others do, it does not mean you don't have your own form of knowledge.

Jesus does not let us be fence gazers, looking out at the world and seeing how we did not grow as we believed we should. Jesus does not let us kill the beautiful parts of us that could grow fruit just because it is not how we believe things should be. Jesus knows God loves us, Jesus knows God has a plan for us, and Jesus knows God gave us a unique combination of skills to be used for the good of creation.

Jesus knew about the difference that one person could do with self-knowledge and self-sacrifice.

Jesus did not let people stare off in the distance with longing for long. He pulled them back into the present with rather ear-catching words. "I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." These words force you into the present; they force you to evaluate your own life and focus on searching for what you could have been missing previously. For what you might have done wrong. You might start looking for that fig tree that is not growing fruit like others are.

Now there is an important reason that Repent or Perish is followed by the Parable of the Fig tree. We need to know how Jesus wants us to react to his words. Because we are in a moment where we want to change, and change can sometimes be seen as destruction. To cut out the things that are not working for us. Yet what does the gardener do?

The gardener asks for time. Not time to cut down the tree. Time to water it, time to fertilize it, time to nurture it into bringing it into a place where it is capable of bringing forth a fruitful future. Time to support it so that it can grow to bless the world with the fruit as it was created to do. Because this gardener was not focused on the trees in the other persons lawn. Because this gardener was not focused on the flaws or the past struggles. Because this gardener was focused on the work that could be done to achieve a better future, this gardener did all the work to make it possible.

This gardener was Jesus.

Now, this is not me just saying that because I love gardens, and I would love Jesus to be a gardener. It is because, on Easter morning, Mary mistook him for a gardener just outside his tomb. Jesus is the expert in self-knowledge, doing one's own work and self-sacrifice to make things better for the future. Jesus is the expert in recognizing and nurturing everyone's unique skills that they might never have noticed without help.

Jesus is so good that he walks us back over the fence to our own yard and empowers us to notice the dead spots in our lives and nurture them to grow. Gazing over the fence can be fun, but we don't always know what the reason behind what we are seeing is. Sometimes our dead fig tree is God's call on our life to be loving, sometimes it is our skills to help others.. It is our way of growing fruit for the kingdom, and we let it die. We were so distracted with what we thought was good, we walked away from the beauty with in us. We walked away from God's call. We walked away from God. Because we know better than God, Right?

I want to share a poem that I find applicable by Erin Hanson

"What if grass is greener on the other side,
Because it's always raining there,
Where the ones who never fail to give,
Hardly have enough to spare,
Where the people with the broadest smiles,
Have pillows filled with tears,
And the bravest ones you've ever known,
Are crippled by their fears,

It's filled with lonely people,
But they're never seen alone,
Where those that lack real shelter,
Make you feel the most at home,
Maybe their grass looks greener,
Because they've painted on its hue,
Just remember from the other side,
Your grass looks greener too."

Looking longingly across the fence does not help us in the long run. It can show us the strengths of those around us, but it can turn our view away from what in our life, what in our lawn can be tended and nurtured to grow. It distracts us from the good God has planned in us. The call that God has for us. It can make us turn and walk away from the beauty we are growing.

Jesus brings our attention to truth, the truth of how we are living a life of second chances and how we, as beloved of God, are blessed with our own unique skills and gifts that we are to nurture and grow. It's fine to appreciate and enjoy the gardens of others and to be blessed by the fruits of their lives. Yet we should never forget the beauty of the garden we are grown within the fence of our lives.

God through Jesus moves us back over the fence to where God has set us up with our own special Garden to grow. Where we can do the work of the kingdom that is uniquely ours. Where we can be with God and with hope for a brighter future.

A new phrase has sprung up to counter the idiom the grass is always greener on the other side, and this idiom says, "the grass is greener where you water it." This suggests that good situations come from the energy you put into them, not from dreaming about them. With Jesus pulling us back to water our own garden, we can grow to do even better things where our fruits can bless others.

So I guess in the end, it really was a positive message we read today.