

*At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or 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? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."*

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

I remember my father's peach trees. I remember the pride he took in them. I was grown up and off at seminary when they began to bear fruit so I seldom tasted the plump, juicy peaches. But I heard about those peaches from many for it was my father's joy to share them. Family members, friends, strangers - when the peaches were ripe Bob was passing them out. Even to this day, more than thirty years after my father has died, once in a while I will talk to someone who speaks of my father and of his peaches.

I was around when those trees were first planted – just twigs growing in the area where we once had a garden. I remember dragging a hose from tree to tree watering. I remember arms aching from digging with a hoe – chopping the weeds out of the dry ground. In those days I tasted no fruit from the trees for they were too young. So I can understand how the gardener must have felt in the parable Jesus told.

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Easy for the owner to say, "cut it down" - for him it was a matter of profit – one tree was the same as the next. But for the gardener all the investment of his time and energy and skill was at stake. One more year – one more chance - he would give this tree special care, maybe it could be saved.

I think of what Jesus has invested in you that you might bear the fruit of love. I think of how the Father in heaven has planted you in the garden of life – of how Jesus has invested his dying and his rising in you – claiming you, forgiving you, instructing you, assuring you. How deep the sorrow and disappointment for Jesus when you or I prove to be fruitless trees. When love in us is only words – good intentions – desires to help never put into action – how we must try our Lord’s patience - our Father in heaven ready to share delicious fruit and the tree full of pretty leaves but not a single apple or peach. Still Jesus begs – one more year – one more chance – I’ll keep working – but then if no fruit, you can cut it down.

When I think of my father’s joy over his peaches I sense how much God wants your life and mine to be God’s gift to our neighbors. We will hear in the baptismal liturgy this morning, Jesus invitation: “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” This invitation is spoken not only to Mark who is being baptized, not only to the people who will be joining this congregation today, but to each and every one of us. In your sharing and in your caring for family, friend and stranger – yes even for enemies – God is glorified – God has joy.

So Jesus is tending to you to bring God joy. He is tending to you for fruit trees never do well on their own. Insects, disease, storms, droughts, all threaten them.

You and I do not do so well on our own either. Love is not easy – nor is forgiving – nor is sharing (especially with those who may not make good use of what we share). It is easy to start off full of enthusiasm for fruit-bearing and then to grow weary when storms come along. So Jesus calls us into a community – makes us members of his own body so that we can be sustained. Jesus feeds us with his word and his own body and blood and gives us one another to keep us all on track. And all along the way he promises that in his body he will feed us and tend us and nourish us through every storm and trial.

One day he will gather all who belong to him in his presence to share the fruit of his love for all eternity. That is Jesus hope and promise for you. Amen.