

PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
"BEARING GOOD FRUIT"
3RD WEDNESDAY IN LENT
WEDNESDAY MARCH 23, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Remember back to 2021. Was it a good year for you or not? Where would you place it on a scale of 1 – 10? Would you rate it an 8, 9 or 10 a good or great year? Was it a success for you because you had a great year with family and friend? Was it a good year because you finally got the closets cleaned out? Was it a good year because you and your family stayed healthy?

Or did you rate 2021 a 5 or below? Not an average year of a 6 or 7 but much lower than that? Covid did disrupt most of what we used to do and the way we did it. Masks, social distancing and covid tests were facts of life. We stayed home a lot and that was not easy for many. Life just wasn't the same and you gave 2021 a 2 as a dreadful year where nothing seemed right.

And now a more difficult question, what kind of person were you in 2021? Do you have some regrets? Should you have behaved differently knowing what you know today? Should you have been more understanding as you look back? Maybe less critical and more supportive, caring, and helpful?

And another even more difficult question, how was your relationship with God in 2021? Did it grow since you were destined to stay home away from COVID more? Did you pray more for loved ones that were in need? Were you

able to hear from God or did He just slip into the background with the other noises of the world around you?

Did you lead a life in 2021 that God would be proud of? Did you speak as a child of God, act like a child of God and love like you had God in your heart? Did you interact with others with love and forgiveness, the same you would wish to expect from them?

Well, this evening our Gospel text is the parable of the fig tree. As brief as it is, I think the point of the parable is clear. Jesus says, "A man had a fig tree and planted it in his vineyard." First, did you ever question why someone would plant a fig tree in a vineyard. Well, as I studied for this message, I found that it was quite common to plant fruit trees in vineyard so they too could take advantage of irrigation that went to the grapevines. I also learned that not only does Leviticus forbid the eating of fruit from a newly planted tree for three years but that fig trees take that long to produce good fruit. The harvest from the fourth year is to go to God and finally the fifth year it can be eaten. Wow, who knew?

Well, we are not sure how old the tree in our parable is, but for three years it has not produced fruit. The owner tells the gardener to cut it down. If it is not producing, why should we keep it as it only takes up space, uses up the goodness of the soil and absorbs the moisture from the ground. Why keep it around if it is not producing and has no purpose? What is the point of having a tree, a fruit bearing tree that does not bear fruit?

I suppose that the owner has the right to be angry. In his garden this tree is useless. It is a big disappointment, so no wonder he wants to destroy it. He wants to use the soil, the grounds' moisture, and his gardener's energy for possibly another tree that will produce.

But the gardener urges Jesus to let it be for one more year and he will fertilize it and tend to it and then if it still does not bear fruit then he agrees that it should be cut down.

As we listen to this story, we realize that Jesus is not talking about a tree here. He is talking about you and me. Are we bearing good fruit for God's kingdom? Or are we wasting God's creation and the opportunities we have been given? Remember those questions I asked in the beginning? How was 2021 for you? Was it a good year of producing for God? Was it a good year of developing a relationship with God, reading His word, helping others, giving to those in

need? Or did we just shut ourselves up using the pandemic as an excuse to stay hidden away in our own little world with no concern for others.

I remember years ago when Dolores Darrow, Linda Smith's mom was the first shut in I visited. She told me that she felt so isolated and not a part of the Christ the Servant family. I reassured her that there was something she could do to participate. She could pray for those on the prayer list. Also, I found a few things for her to do, like folding bulletins, etc. Today, we have a shut-in as our card lady. She sends out cards for deaths or illness or for some celebrations in our CTS family. She also prays for all of us and stays connected with God by studying His word with an online study group. No matter where you are you can use the gifts our Father gave us you further his kingdom. So how did you do in 2021?

Well, we cannot change the past, but we can start a new today making 2022 a better year. We have a God that is so compassionate that He sent his only son to die a horrible death for us on a rugged cross. And through the resurrection, God gave us undeserved yet most gracious gifts of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. What an awesome God we have.

God gives us all the wonderful talents and gifts we need to bear much fruit in His world. We occupy valuable space in His garden, a garden of rich soil. We are nourished each day by the Word made flesh. Bearing fruit is our response to an amazing life that God affords us through His only Son Jesus.

So, I hope we will all give some thought to how our lives can bear good fruit in 2022 and beyond. Remember to stay connected to God. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who abide in me, and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Trust that your connection to Jesus will have you rating each year on that 1 to 10 scale near the top. Know that our faithful and compassionate creator, will be there ready to help us experience fully the abundant life that is ours through Christ Jesus.
AMEN