



Then [Jesus] 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””

~Luke 13:1-9

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## **Move to the Center – 10 Minutes**

*Note: Times are just suggestions to help structure your time. Feel free to adjust to suit your situation best.*

Take time to center yourselves. Check in with each other to see how the past week has been and what you all are hoping for in the week to come. Write down any prayer requests that are lifted up. Then, pray your own prayer, inviting God to be present with you during this time of study and conversation (including any prayer requests that were surfaced) or use the following prayer:

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today. May our hearts be open to your movement in our lives and world. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, and for showing us we have no need of comparing our lives to others. Help us to bear fruit in our own lives and communities. Amen.

## **Move into the Text – 20 Minutes**

Read the Luke 13:1-9. If you have a favorite translation, feel free to read from that one instead of from the bulletin. Once the passage has been read out loud, take 2 or 3 minutes to re-read it silently, and/or take time to ponder, letting the Spirit guide your brief meditation.

- What do you find most surprising about this reading?
- Does anything in the reading bring you a particular hope?
- Does anything in the reading trouble you, or make you uncomfortable?

In Luke 9:1-5 Jesus is confronted by people who are wondering if terrible misfortunes and early demise of other people was because they were horrible sinners. Jesus makes it quite clear: No. God does not punish people by giving them suffering and death. But, in the same breath, Jesus makes it clear that their own unwillingness to confront their need for repentance could, in fact, bring disaster upon themselves. In other words, God doesn't doom sinners to suffering and death – and that wasn't the cause of the death and suffering of the people they are talking about. But he seems to say, know this: Your own hard heartedness could, indeed, bring you into your own suffering.

- If God doesn't cause the suffering and death of sinners, why might sinfulness bring suffering?
- Do you think Jesus is talking only about personal sin here? Or, is he also talking about sinfulness within entire communities or groups? Why?

Jesus tells a parable about a man planting a fig tree. He comes out to check on it, likely after at least a couple of years of growth. Though he expects to find fruit, he doesn't and orders the gardener to

cut it down. The gardener seems to have some real hope that the tree will, indeed bear fruit and pleads with the owner to give it another year. We don't hear how the story ends, but we do know that the gardener does all he can to give it what it needs. The tree gets a second chance.

- Why do you think the gardener was so connected to the tree?
- The parable was addressed to Luke's community – a community that was looking for the imminent return of Jesus, but who were not seeing it when they expected. Luke was in many ways attempting to encourage his community of Jesus followers. Where do you find encouragement in this parable? How do you think his readers would have interpreted this passage?

### **Move into Today – 20 Minutes**

*Take time to think about how the reading intersects with the world we live in today, as well as how it connects to your own life.*

God knows that we often compare ourselves to others. The most common ways we do that today revolve around what others “have” that we don't. Many of us find ourselves wishing we had the experience/possessions/life/etc. that others have. But today we see the flipside to this coin. We are not immune to blaming the misfortune of others on their worthiness, their way of life, their choices or even God's judgement. Instead of “the grass is greener” on the other side of the fence, we are sometimes fascinated by the fact that, “the field is on fire on the other side of the fence.”

- Why do you think we so often compare our perceived shortcomings to others' perceived blessings? What do you think we are trying to accomplish by doing this? What do you think we *actually* accomplish by doing this?
- Jesus attempts to get his listeners to come back into their own yard and to focus on their own “grass.” Describe a time when you were paying attention to someone else's blessing or misfortune, while ignoring your own life and work. What made you realize you were focusing on the wrong thing?
- Imagine you are the fig tree in the parable. You know you've got the capacity to bear fruit, but maybe you aren't doing so as much as you would like. What do you need to increase your fruit-bearing yield?
- Imagine our current American society is the fig tree in the parable. We know we have the capacity to bear much more fruit than we are. What do we need to increase our fruit-bearing yield?

### **Move into the Future – 5 Minutes**

Think about how you might keep this passage in mind throughout the rest of the week. Can you develop a mantra reminding you that God is with you in your own struggles? Do you need a second chance at something? Do you need some nourishment to produce some beautiful fruit? Make sure to ask God for what you need throughout the week.

### **Move to Adieu – 5 minutes**

Spend some time reflecting on your conversation before leaving. You can ask yourselves these or similar questions:

- What went well? What could have gone better? What was your “Top Take Home Idea”?