

There are just moments we never get used to. We know death comes to all, but how do we deal with murder, the evil devastation of Ukraine, or cancer in a child? Why are famine and disease more prevalent in impoverished countries? Are hurricanes, famine, or car accidents divine punishments?

Why does it often seem those who should be rewarded by God are punished, and those who should be punished by God are rewarded? We assume fairness should be guaranteed and question God when it isn't. How many political debates are geared by such thoughts? Whatever anyone wants should be a right, and whenever anyone feels that they have been treated unfairly, someone else should be punished. Why is life often so unfair?

People in Jesus' day asked him the same question, over and over again. And so he used their own current events to facilitate a discussion. He asked if citizens killed by Pilate or lives lost in a building accident were because they were more guilty than those who weren't affected? His answer was "No! It is a broken world." That has been biblical message from the beginning. Adam and Eve broke trust. Cain murdered his brother. Babel was an attempt to use man's wisdom to play God. Sin is the result of sin. It is a symptom of a world which has abandoned God for the idolatry of self. Genesis is not about God creating the potential for sin but exposing the pain of selfishness and sin.

All live with this guilt and suffer this brokenness. All die because life isn't heaven on earth. In this imperfect world, evil people do get away with murder and some good people face undeserved pain. St. Paul said, "All sin and fall short of God's glory." Without God's intervention it would be worse – not just now but forever!

Jesus used a fig tree to help his audience understand the answer. When a tree does what we expect, we don't question God's goodness. When the harvest isn't what we expect, we complain about failure and give up! The parable's punch line introduces a new twist as Jesus asks, "why not give it another chance?" His approach was always based on grace. Rather than allowing us to control the question, he offers grace. "Why not give it, or her, or him another year? Why not work on this a little longer? Why not encourage growth rather than obsess over brokenness?" Why not surrender to God what you cannot control?

It is like the old adage about not crying over spilled milk. Maybe we should worry less about fairness and more about what it means to be a disciple. That has always been God's approach. Cain was protected. The ark saved a creation drowning in sin. A great fish turned Jonah's escape into discipleship. After adultery and murder, David was given another chance. Story after story, God is consistent in his love that offers more second chances than any deserve.

Sometimes we miss the point of gifts right before us. Many celebrate St. Patrick's Day as an excuse to drink, but what a wasted opportunity to grow! Patrick was captured, tortured, and carried away as a slave. In prison, he came to know Jesus. He escaped and returned home with no guarantee of maintaining freedom. But he was convinced he was saved to share Christ in his homeland that had not yet come to faith. His faith became a light in the darkness and brought a nation to faith.

The image of a worthless fig tree nursed back to life by outside help (a gardener who will dig and fertilize) is quite a sight. It points to Jesus' journey from heaven to embrace us as a helpless infant, surrendering his glory to rub shoulders with lepers and outcasts,

and being planted in the dirt of a tomb! This is grace and shows God's love for the sake of broken lives! Faith fertilizes brokenness and death. Easter colors the answer to every question. Rather than worry about fairness we are freed by grace. Paul reminds that no matter what the suffering, God provides a way to endure! In other words, faith fertilizes brokenness and death. It is always about another chance!

Those who struggle to make world fair will always struggle and feel empty. Those who celebrate Christ will see opportunities God provides for change. Those who look for escape and excuses will always wonder why life seems dark, while those who are faithful always look for the means to be fruitful.

A tree with no fruit for three years was useless, yet the gardener was not willing to give up. Similarly, Jesus came to dig in the dirt of his earthly garden. The deeper he dug, the closer he came to our pain. Finally, he joined us in death. Planted in the earth he attacked the unfairness of sin with his eternal escape.

Life is full of sin and death. It is a broken world. But through gifts of grace, Jesus has removed the need to wrestle with our brokenness. Instead, he simply asks, "Now that I have given you another chance, how will you seek to live?"

Life is not matter of what is fair or unfair, but of faith! So, whatever my abundance or shortage, life is a gift to glorify God and be a blessing for those around me. God has fed me with his love, and that will make every difference in the world. With such assurance, let faith rather than an obsession with fairness be the fertilizer, and the light of your life. When Jesus said "let it grow" he was talking about gifts like faith and grace that he has planted in our lives. These are the seeds that bring the undeserved, life changing miracle of peace!

Once upon a time a young mother was dying. She had three young children and loved a husband she would not grow old with. A Christian friend told her, "You need to accept your cancer as a test of your faith." She asked her husband, "What then is the reason for faith? That would mean if I had no faith, God wouldn't have tested me with cancer? Am I being punished because I have faith? Does that mean if I didn't have faith God have kept me healthy?" Rather than comfort from another believer she was confused. She couldn't believe what she had heard! Neither do I.

That beautiful young mother's cancer was not a test. What someone told her was terribly unfair. She was assured by her husband that God wouldn't do that to her, but instead was holding her closer to Him than ever! She was back on track and fully confident in the faith that would sustain her and the family through a time in their lives that was patently unfair. Faith fertilized her fear and something beautiful grew out of her painful reality.

Many were touched by her life, as her faith was more powerful than someone else's decision to speak for God'. Rather than wallow in her suffering she took time to prepare her youngsters for a life without their mom by their side. Rather than struggling with unanswerable questions her loving faith became a light to everyone around her and a witness of the power of Easter in the face of certain death. She allowed what God had planted in her to blossom and grow, just as it will for all of us.

As so many of you have witnessed in your own lives, as faith fertilizes life the fruit that follows is more than what is expected or deserved. That is what Jesus meant when he said, "let it grow!"