Preaching Among Friends

Final Project Sermon - February 27, 2025

and March 23, 2025

Morning Prayer

Sherri Matthew

Good morning, everyone!

It’s winter, it’s cold…

Rose bushes in Vermont winters. We hope our plants survive! You look at the canes and they look kind of dead. Sometimes they are. June comes along and they still look dead. Then July. August. Nothing. Check back next year – after some fertilizing, weeding and making sure the canes aren’t getting roasted by the sun – sometimes you might get a pleasant surprise. Has happened to me.

But what if they don’t? Sort of like Jesus’ parable about the fig tree… The gardener had a fig tree that was doing the same thing… no grow, no fruit. Finally, the plan was to do some proper fertilizing and if the thing was still looking dead a year later, then rip it out. Sort of like us… we may need some proper care during our lives… nourishment, support and yes, weeding out of things in our lives that are choking us and holding back our growth potential.

In the reading, Jesus talks a bit about the need for repentance (also known as sincere regret or remorse). Apparently back in His day, people actually believed that those who suffered were being punished for their sin (or whatever wrongdoings they had committed… that’s why the first part of the text reads the way it does). Fortunately, in the text you can see He’s pushing back on that idea, but He does insist on the need for us to turn around anyway, because as He points out, this is the way to Life. For us today, the word can be redefined as a journey, a return of sorts from self-imposed exile… the mind that you have and self-limiting thoughts and ideas.

And to illustrate that idea, there’s the fig tree parable.

Well, here in Vermont, the rose bushes just might send up a new cane! And we might make a fresh start too… Healing and growing begins with personal change. Letting go of the old leads to:

Our congregation will find joy in the new life as they feel more deeply connected to other members. Friendships deepen and rifts are healed, as people continue to work in ongoing ministries outside our church and support one another in times of need and celebrate together at happy times.

Here’s a hopeful thought:

God’s happy and here to help us grow. He gives us His comfort, care, warmth and forgiveness, that makes it possible for us to thrive.

That’s encouraging, because it can help us to believe that:

His Son Jesus is both teacher and master gardener, and He can show us the way, if we are lost. If we pray to Him, He can help us to find and remove the obstacles that keep us from living in the New Life. He can lead us to those sources of spiritual nourishment that make growth possible.

We are the rose bushes in God’s garden; let’s seek to bloom for Him.

*Preached by Sherri Matthew on Thursday, February 27, 2025 online as the final project sermon for peer evaluation and appraisal for the Preaching Among Friends course offered by the Vermont Episcopal Diocese and again on Sunday, March 23, 2025 at St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church, Brandon, in completion of lay licensing and course certification requirements.*