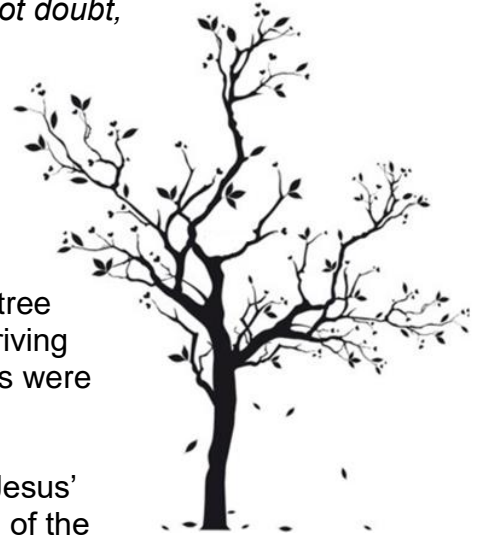


Daily Devotion for Wednesday September 9, 2020

In the morning, when [Jesus] returned to [Jerusalem], he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive." – Matthew 21:18-22

Bible commentaries point out that when a fig tree is mentioned in scripture, it's one of those often-used images meant to spark a mental connection. Especially in the books of the prophets, a fig tree is a common image for the leadership of God's people Israel. Thriving or withering fig trees symbolized how the people and their leaders were succeeding or failing in their call to rely on God alone.



In today's scene from Matthew 21, we've just heard the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, quickly followed by his "cleansing of the temple." Chapters 21 through 25 tell the story of the growing conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of the capital city, and Jesus makes it clear that God is doing a "new thing" through him. The corruption and faithlessness of the regime of that time is giving way to a new movement.

It's important that thousands of years later, we hear this as a continuation and renewal, not a replacement, of God's covenant with Israel. In Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus tells everyone, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach." God is not rejecting Israel, but creating in Jesus a new way for *all* people to connect with God.

In today's scene, Jesus reveals that this new way is a way of *faith* and *prayer*. It is also a way of *community*, since the word "you" is *plural* every time it appears here. So whatever becomes of the leaders and details of the old way, God will make a new way – even when it seems impossible! His amazed disciples, then and now, may be totally unable to imagine what the new way will be like, but can expect that God will be with them, and that together their faith and prayers will keep them connected with God and with one another.

Faithful God, we may be shocked when the world changes, and trusted institutions and traditions are threatened. Thank you for reminding us of the new covenant you've made with us in Christ. Whatever is going on around us, we pray, and we know you will respond. Keep our eyes and hearts focused on you. Guide our feet in following faithfully. And inspire us to pray and travel and work together as one. Teach us to watch for your new way, and to trust and rely on you, no matter what! Amen.

Pastor Jim Watson
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