

April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Matthew 21:18-22 “Be Fruitful” (CTW - Galatians 5:22-23)**

Okay, pastor... last week you made a *very* specific promise. You said that during this capital campaign, you weren't going to dangle us over the flames or try to make us feel guilty so that we'd give more money. And yet—this week—you give us *this* scripture? Isn't this one of those passages most pastors avoid like the plague, even when it shows up in the lectionary? I mean, let's be honest—most of us would rather tackle one of Paul's “women should be silent in church” passages than this one!

Here's what this one seems like - Jesus gets hungry, sees a fig tree, doesn't find any fruit... and kills it. So yeah... let's unpack this. First of all, this isn't about Jesus having a bad morning. It's not about him being so hungry that he's angry. This is a classic Jesus teaching moment—acted out in real time. Think about how often Jesus uses farming imagery. Seeds. Soil. Vines. Harvest. Here, the lesson is about the difference between **appearance and reality**. It's about something that looks healthy on the outside... but isn't actually producing anything life-giving.

Some of you might remember that we had this silver maple tree in our backyard for years. It gave us some great shade on the hot side of the house. And when Graham and Sam were living with us, they'd tease their dog Luna before letting her out. "Hey Luna... is it time... to... go get... the squirrel?" And she'd bolt out the door, leap into the air, and try to scramble up that tree whether there was a squirrel there or not. But over time, the tree started to change. Branches started to die off one by one. Any time it got windy, a branch would inevitably fall off. One spring, a whole section didn't bud at all. It started looking a little rough, so we called in a tree specialist.

He climbed up, took a look around, and came down with bad news: "This tree has to come down. There's no saving it." And I thought—that seems a little extreme. It still gives shade. It still looks "okay" I guess. But I trusted him. And when the tree came down, we saw the truth. From the outside, it looked fine. But the trunk was rotten. Hollow in places. What looked strong... wasn't. Maybe that's not the perfect example, though. Because Jesus isn't just talking about something that's sick. He's talking about something that looks healthy... but produces nothing.

So here's a better illustration that involves a person. A guy we did business with for several years. He was a bodybuilder—absolutely jacked. Same height as me,

about the same weight—but he carried it *very* differently. Broad shoulders, narrow waist. The kind of guy who probably had to tailor his suits because nothing off the rack would fit right. He knew everything about nutrition. Discipline. Training. But he was also a heroin addict. And when I found out, I couldn't believe it. Because that's not what we think of, right? We expect addiction to look a certain way. Hollow cheeks. Skinny. Unkempt. But over time, the truth became clear. His life was unraveling. His family had cut ties. He had lied, cheated, and stolen too many times. He talked about getting help, but never followed through. Eventually, he died of an overdose. He looked strong on the outside. But inside, things were falling apart.

Now—Jesus isn't saying that people are trees. But he *is* asking a hard question: **What is your life producing?** And that's where our scripture from Galatians helps us. Paul gives us language for what “fruit” actually looks like: Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Generosity. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. That's the fruit of the Spirit. Not appearances. Not activity. Not busy-ness. Fruit. And Paul says—these things *should* be visible. They should be obvious. Which means, most of the time, it's not that hard to tell what's good and what isn't. Where it gets tricky is when something *looks* good... but *isn't* producing any fruit. And that's where Jesus' words—

harsh as they may sound—start to make sense. If a tree isn't producing fruit as it should...  
what is it for?

Now let's be honest. Churches can fall into this same pattern. A church can have a building. A nice one. It can have programs. Activities. A long history in the community. People might say, "Oh yeah—I know that church. It's been around forever." But the real question isn't: Are we busy? Are we maintaining? Do we *look* healthy? The real question is: **Are we bearing fruit?** Are lives being changed? Do people feel safe and welcomed? Is ministry actually happening?

So let's bring this home. This capital campaign we've launched— It's not about making the tree look better. It's about making sure it can bear fruit. Yes, we're talking about very practical things. Upgrading HVAC systems so people can gather in comfort. Improving security so people feel safe. Creating spaces that are more welcoming and hospitable. Caring for our grounds in ways that are responsible and sustainable. Those are real needs. But they're not the goal. They're the conditions that allow fruit to grow and *continue* to grow long after. Because when people come here, we want them to experience something real. Not just a nice building—but love. Welcome. Connection. Hope.

And here's where Jesus takes this one step further. The disciples are amazed at what happened to the tree. But Jesus doesn't stay focused on the tree. He turns to them and says: "If you have faith and do not doubt... even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done."

In other words— This isn't just about what's wrong. It's about what's *possible*. And that's where we are right now as a church. We can look at what we have. We can name what needs attention. We can even feel overwhelmed by it. Or— **We can trust that God is able to do something more.** Not someday. Not somewhere else. Right here. Through us.

So the question isn't just about buildings or budgets. The question is: **Do we want to be the kind of church that bears fruit in the years ahead?** Because if the answer is yes... then this moment matters. What we do now matters. Because fruit doesn't just happen. It grows where people are willing to trust, to invest, and to step forward in faith.

And we trust—that God is able to do something more. So this week, I invite you to reflect on this: **What kind of fruit do I hope this church will bear in the years ahead—and how might God be calling me to help make that possible?**