

“SETTING THE TABLE”

“The Sweetness of God’s Abundance”

We have begun our sermon series “Setting the Table.” In our culture and society food has in some ways become an issue. We have gotten used to eating so fast (most school children must eat in 20 minutes or less), or we are so concerned because of whatever diet we may be on that food is seen as problem, rather than a gift or a blessing. From the beginning, the Bible has shown how God is interested in food and providing for the basic needs of God’s beloved children. Beginning in the garden of Eden, God gives food for human beings to delight in and to enjoy. The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy was so that human beings would worship God, give thanks for the gifts of the earth in bread and wine and to feast as a family together. The focus for this week is figs. Mostly, as Midwesterners, our understanding of figs comes from “fig newtons.” Biblically, figs were an image of abundance and sweetness. A fig tree lived for decades and produced an amazing harvest. This week we are invited to pay attention to how God is nurturing our lives for an abundant harvest of grace and love.

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“The Sweetness of God’s Abundance”**

Daily prayer: *Loving God, I praise you for the gift of another day. I was able to open my eyes and I felt my heart beating. That’s because your mercy still stands for sure. I trust that it is your will that I should bear fruit. I want to do so in order that the world will see your love and grace in me. Help me, Holy God, to achieve this. Because the world needs our abundant and sweet grace, may the fruit I share be to your glory alone. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.*

Study Guide

Monday, August 19, 2019 Luke 13: 6-9

This is a hard parable. It comes between Jesus answering questions about tragic things happening to people and healing a woman who had suffered for 18 years. Jesus in the first case notes that people didn't die tragically because they were worse than anyone else, they died because all people die. Jesus wants hearts and lives changed regardless. This parable speaks of fig tree that was not producing fruit. Fig trees are amazing fruit producers, so the owner was going to dig it up rather than waste any more time, money and effort on that tree. However, the gardener asked for another year. Why, you might ask? Because typically it takes four years for a fig tree to produce and this one had only been planted for three. Cutting it down, would only mean it would come back and then four more years would be needed. Figs trees produce at least 2 harvests a year and they are harvested day upon day upon day. They are an excellent example of abundance. However, they do need to be nurtured and cared for before they produce their first crop. So, *how do you nurture yourself in a dry season? How do you find ways to care for your soul so that your life can produce amazing fruit?*

Tuesday, August 20, 2019 Micah 4: 1-2

This is a beautiful passage from Micah. It comes right after he tells Judah that destruction is coming. The prophets always remind us that even though destruction is promised, so is restoration and redemption. God longs for people to take care of the poor, the outcast and the vulnerable. The promise is that the day is coming when all people will stream to God. The image used is a mountain, because you can see a mountain from far away and the vision of people streaming toward God to learn God's ways is powerful. This promise speaks of the abundance of God's love and mercy, not just for a few people or some people but all people, for all nations. People will receive God's word. What a sweet gift for people seeking God. Like a fig tree that produces generation to generation, God's promise and word goes forth to all. *Where do you see God at work in the world? What one thing could you do today to share in that work in the world?*

Wednesday August 21, 2019 Micah 4: 3-4

Peace and prosperity are the images of these verses. There will be peace, real peace between nations and peoples. There will be no fear or terror and all weapons will be made into tools for growth, for food and to make the world a garden if you will. The vision of each person sitting under their vines and fig trees is one of true abundance, even though those of us from the Midwest might not understand that. Fig trees have at least two harvests and in the middle east often there are three. They produce 50-75,000 figs each year. Can you imagine? What a sweet abundant harvest. This vision of peace and prosperity is a deep one that crosses cultural boundaries. Everyone wants to have enough for their family to be taken care of and to know that they will be safe. This is the promise of God. *How do you envision the peace and prosperity that God offers? How does the image of the fig trees' yearly harvest help you see how God can work in your life to produce fruit to create that kingdom of peace?*

Thursday August 22, 2019 Luke 13: 6-9

Looking again at this parable after reading Micah, how do you react to the owner's demand? Do you see the gardener in a different light? Did you know, that a fig tree, once established will live 80-100 years? Think of one fig tree producing 50,000 to 75,000 figs each year for eighty plus years. What a wonderful and generous God we have to give us this imagery of grace and mercy and love. *How can you allow God to help you be as amazing and abundant as a fig tree? How is God's grace working in you and through you?*

Friday August 23, 2019 Matthew 7: 15-20

Jesus says we will be known by our fruit. Bad trees don't produce good fruit, but good trees do produce good fruit. Growing as followers of Christ means we are challenged and encouraged to be like a fig tree: offering up abundant fruit for the harvest. Our lives, our time, our energy, our talents are the fruit we offer. *In what ways are you willing to offer yourself up for a great harvest? What fruits are being grown and shared in your life right now? How can you be nurtured in ways that will help deepen your faith and encourage your growth?*