

Dear Friends,

Mark 11: 20-23

Jesus and his friends are going into Jerusalem again. When they went in yesterday Jesus cursed a fig tree that had produced no fruit. Today they notice that the fig tree has withered away. It is dead right down to its roots. In Mark's gospel this is Jesus' only miracle in Jerusalem. It is also the only example Mark gives of Jesus cursing. Usually, he blesses and brings life. On this occasion, he brings death.

I suggested that we see ourselves as the tree that Jesus examines. Might Jesus curse us and bring us to destruction? I don't believe so. Jesus comes so that we may not perish but may have eternal life. There is however that within each one of us which needs to die. There are those things which block us from being really fruitful. They need to wither and die down to their roots. This doesn't happen easily. It can take a lifetime. It can require painful sacrifice on our part. We do not need to be afraid. God is the gardener. God knows exactly what treatment to give and when to give it to make us flourish.

The friends of Jesus point out the withered tree. He assures them that if they have faith and do not doubt their prayers too will be answered. We tend to think that to have doubt is to find something difficult to believe. The Greek word really means to waver, it is to be double minded, in two minds. Jesus invites you to have faith, to know your need of God and to look only to God to save and help you, to put all your eggs in the one basket of trust in God. To doubt, by contrast, is to hedge your bets and to put your confidence not only in God but also in other sources of help.

Jesus says that if his friends have this single-minded confidence in God then they will be able to say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea" and it will come to pass. Moving a mountain was an image that was used for doing something difficult. But it may be worth remembering that the temple was known as The Mountain of the Lord. Is Jesus saying that it's the temple that needs to be moved? The prophets looked forward to a time when the temple would be the highest mountain and all the people from all the nations would come to it and give themselves to God. It's a beautiful image. It's Judaism at its generous, most welcoming best. But all religions fall short sometimes and maybe at this moment the temple was not quite the house of prayer for all nations that God wanted it to be. The things that were blocking the temple from being truly fruitful needed to die, down to their roots. Jesus pictures The Mountain of the Lord but it is not lifted up high, it is uprooted and thrown into the depths of the sea.

By the time that Jesus said this, the activity in the temple had returned to normal. What Jesus had done the day before had been annoying for those who had to manage the temple. It had taken time to get everything back in place. But they got there. It was soon business as usual. The buying and selling and money changing continued. However, it didn't last. By the time that Mark wrote his gospel the precious contents of the temple had been taken away and the building had been destroyed.

God ordains us and the institutions to which we belong to bear fruit. When we produce more leaves than fruit, then God prunes, cleanses and renews us, that we may bear more fruit, fruit that will last.

God bless you,

Tony