

Listen up, Church of the Resurrection: Lent is almost half over. How's that going for you?

- Maybe you've given something up for Lent this year:
 - Given up a habit that's getting in your way in life, or
 - Given up a favorite food or beverage.

If so, I commend you if that's helping you to examine your spiritual life.

- Maybe you've taken on something new for Lent this year:
 - Taken on a new spiritual practice, like meditation or fasting, or
 - Taken on a new help given to someone in need.

If so, I commend you if that's helping you to get closer to God.

Now, I know that each of YOU **are still being faithful** to your Lenten commitments. However, I wondered this week how many Americans continue their Lenten commitments throughout the 40 days of Lent. Curiously, Google let me down; no data! Unlike New Year's resolutions, apparently **everyone** continues their Lenten practices all the way from Ash Wednesday to Easter:

- Maybe because the period of Lent is shorter, just 40 days instead of a whole year;
- Maybe because Sundays don't count (technically) as Lent, so we get a one day in seven reprieve (technically).
- Maybe because we are all just super observant during Lent ... RIGHT, that's it!

At any rate, in the middle of my curiosity about how long **most people** keep their Lenten commitments, I re-read our gospel lesson for today. In years past, the first part of the lesson is what has caught my attention, containing as it does the most direct answer that God has ever given to the "Why question:"

- "Why, God, do you allow bad things to happen to good people?" and
- "Why, God, do you allow bad things to happen to ME?" and
- And, while we are cross-examining God, "Why does suffering and death even exist?"

The reason that Jesus' answer has caught my attention in the past is that Jesus says, "No, bad things don't happen to people because they are bad." Then Jesus turns our attention away from blaming God to warn that we need to pay attention to our own spiritual health—as we do especially during Lent—otherwise, Jesus says, we, too will perish.

What catches my attention this year, though, is the parable that Jesus paired with his answer about "Why evil?" The parable is about a fig tree that isn't producing figs. We don't know if this particular fig

tree has **ever** produced figs, or if it used to produce figs and has stopped. All we know is that the tree is using the sunshine, water, and nutrients from the soil that God provides and the tree is benefitting from tending by the gardener that God provides. And yet, the tree isn't producing the fruit it was put into this world to produce. So, the one who owns the land—and the sunshine and the water and the soil—wants to cut the tree down and use those resources for another tree, a fig tree that produces figs.

You heard the gospel lesson, so you know how the parable ends: the gardener intercedes on the tree's behalf. He pleads to spare the tree, promises to give the tree more tending, and wins the tree a one-year reprieve from the axe.

So, listen up, Church of the Resurrection: Our lives are half over, aren't they? How's **that** going for you? Are you still "bearing fruit," still doing the very things that God gives you life to do? OK, so the fact that you are here in church today is a very good start: You are here to worship God, so you are still a Christ tree. But are you bearing Christ fruit, even in this world where tyrants act, in this world where towers fall, and in this world where tragedies happen?

There's a sign on the wall of the parish office with some elaborate text. Maybe you've seen the sign and been able to read the message shared there. The sign says something like, "What would you do if you knew today would be the last of your life?" and then the sign asks, "What's stopping you?"

Those "last acts" we might be putting off doing are the kind of "Christ fruit" I'm thinking of here: asking forgiveness from someone we might have hurt and left the hurt unresolved; mending a long-broken relationship; forgiving a debt; and the like. Or maybe you've already taken care of all these things.

Or maybe not yet. Perhaps, like the character Valjean in *Les Miserables*, you think:

"Tomorrow we'll be far away,

Tomorrow is the judgment day

Tomorrow we'll discover

What our God in Heaven has in store!

One more dawn

One more day

One day more!"

Today, God apparently has given us one day more. How will you use this day, the rest of this Lent, to continue to produce the "fruit" in your life that God put you here to produce?

Continue to be the love,

Continue to share the love.

Not just your love, but the love that God has given you.