

## **Another Year For Fruitfulness**

I am a subscriber to the digital edition of Time magazine.  
It is still, it is the most prestigious  
international news magazine,  
although I do not agree with its left-leaning ideology,  
it is still the most prestigious one.  
I call your attention to that,  
because in its very first issue in the year 2023,  
and 2023 is their centennial year,  
they started publishing in 1923,  
so this year will be centennial for them.  
And their very first publication for the year  
has to do with a secret of happiness experts.  
That's the over story.  
The secrets of happiness experts.  
I did not even know that there is a profession  
known as happiness experts.  
So I suppose they are studying what happiness is,  
and reading the advice in the interview part  
of one such expert, he says, or I should say she says,  
being happy is being true to yourself.  
And that means your emotions and everything  
that have to do with yourself,  
and to me that is a giveaway.  
Happiness lies within you,  
and you can be happy by tapping that  
which is within yourself.  
And you see, that is wrong,  
because if you know what yourself is before God,  
and in your nature, you cannot say that true happiness  
is being true to yourself.  
This is one of the reasons that I personally find it  
difficult to use the adjective happy when I grip.  
Instead of happy birthday, I prefer joyous birthday.  
Instead of a happy New Year,  
I prefer to say blessed New Year.  
Not that I have anything against being happy,  
but this happiness experts only proved my suspicion  
that the idea of many is flawed  
when it comes to what it means becoming happy.  
If experts can be wrong,  
what do you think of those who are not experts?  
Men and women, of course, crave to be happy,

and some claim to be experts in how to become happy,  
but most of them prove wrong.

Will you be happy in the year 2023?

Well, that is the wrong question,  
because the right question is will you be fruitful  
in the right way in the year 2023?

And I'm using a passage that I've used several times  
in the past, a passage that is rich with application  
to anything that is a beginning, especially to a new year.  
It is applicable as a warning.

You may have had certain opportunities in the year 2022,  
but you let pass those opportunities,  
whatever those opportunities may be,  
vocational, personal relationship,  
or more importantly, spiritual opportunity,  
but do not take comfort from having another year,  
because you might be saying to yourself,  
nothing bad happened to me  
even though I did not take the opportunity,  
and now I have another year.

What worse can happen this year?

And I'm asking simply the question without meaning to scare,  
but it is a legitimate consideration.

What if you have just one more year?

One more year of that opportunity.

And with that thought,

I invite you again to that same parable of the fig tree  
that Jesus taught to the crowd in Luke chapter 13.

We will read again verses six to nine.

In Luke 13 verses six to nine, and he told this parable,  
a man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard,  
and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

And he said to the vine dresser, look, for three years now,  
I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree,  
and I find none, cut it down.

Why should it use up the ground?

And he answered, sir, let it alone this year also  
until I dig around it and put on manure.

Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good.

But if not, you can cut it down.

I told you the larger context

as well as the more immediate context of this parable,  
the larger context is that of the journey  
of Jesus to Jerusalem.

Luke makes much of that journey because he uses the biggest material of his gospel in following that journey to Jerusalem, from Galilee to Jerusalem, and there are many events and discourses and teaching along the journey to Jerusalem. In other words, this passage occurs in the middle of that journey where Jesus was looking to the completion of his mission, and he is giving this parable in the light of what he will do in Jerusalem.

He is going to die, he is going to die for sinners, but he knows that he will be rising from the dead, and through the death and resurrection, you have the gospel that we are seeking to spread to all the world.

So it is in that light that Jesus is giving his teachings in this passage of the Gospel of Luke, and this particular parable occurs right after the immediate context where the crowd was asking Jesus what he can say concerning the tragedy that happened and befell some of the Galileans, some fatal tragedies that happened to them, and twice Jesus gives this statement as an answer, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

So in other words, it is in that context of appealing for repentance.

It doesn't matter how you die, you may die tragically, as those Galileans, according to the tragedy that happened to them, or you may die peacefully.

You may die young, you may die old, whatever form of death that you die by.

The more important question is when you die, what happens? And if you die unrepentant, Jesus is telling this crowd, do not imagine that they are worse off because their death is tragic.

Even if your death is peaceful, the question is, have you turned away from sin to put yourself under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ?

And that is repentance, unless you repent, you will likewise perish, and perishing there definitely means something that happens after death.

It is not death itself, it is not anything before death, but rather that which comes after death.

There is a perishing after death for the unrepentant.  
Now in that context, the Lord Jesus gives this parable,  
and that is why we draw as a first implication  
or message from this parable.

This is meant for those who need to repent  
in order to experience salvation in Jesus Christ.

So last week in our beginning,  
the message is a message for an appeal to repentance.  
The opportunity for salvation will not last  
and should not be delayed.

But now from that message addressed  
to those needing repentance,  
I want now to draw a message that addresses  
those of us who already have repented.

We are now followers of Jesus,  
but this parable still applies to us  
because remember the owner of the vineyard  
and the owner of the fig tree planted in that vineyard  
is looking for fruitfulness.

And fruitfulness as used in the New Testament,  
including the Gospel of Luke,  
is very much a reference to how we grow  
as believers, as followers of the Lord Jesus.

So my message this morning to conclude  
our consideration of this parable is this.

Christian fruitfulness is expected to grow perceptively  
with duration of time.

Pamumumam Christiano aina asahang luma go na na mamalayan  
havang tumata galampanahun.

Christian fruitfulness is expected to grow perceptively  
with duration of time.

Now the more popular phrase is we speak of spiritual growth.

And that is why this can only happen to genuine believers.

You do not think about growing as a Christian  
before you come to faith in Christ.

That is why the first message has to do with repentance.

But once you repent, once you become a true follower  
of Jesus Christ and he rules over you,  
then there is still much to expect of us.

And what is expected of us is what the owner of the vineyard  
in this parable is seeking to see in the fig tree.

I told you that the fig tree is expected to bear fruit  
in three seasons every year.

Now this owner has been coming to this vineyard

and looking for fruit in the fig tree  
and has found none for three years.  
And it is time to be cut down in order  
that it may yield space to better and more purposeful use.  
But the vine dresser appealed on behalf of the fig tree  
to give it one more year.  
So there is that appeal to those  
who are still without repentance.  
You may have one more year, you never know  
because whatever you have now as continuing life  
is extended mercy.  
But we can also apply this to the people of God.  
The figure of the fig tree in which the owner  
finds no fruit is an apt warning even to believers.  
You ask yourself, did you grow in the previous year?  
Did you grow in your Christian life?  
You can answer that because growth is perceptible.  
And now there is another year,  
you have opportunity to grow spiritually  
and of the many forms of growth that we can address,  
I want to focus on what we can draw  
from the gospel of Luke  
and from two parallels of fruitfulness.  
In the gospel of Luke, I draw these two modes of fruitfulness  
that Christians should seek to grow in.  
First is reception of the word yielding obedience.  
And the second mode of growth is devotion to the church,  
driving fellowship and so when we ask ourselves the question,  
did I grow as a Christian?  
Did I grow as a follower of Christ?  
Did I see spiritual growth in the year  
that was passed in the year 2022?  
One question to answer is if you grow  
in terms of your reception of the word  
and that growth is going to be perceived by obedience.  
Reception of the word yielding obedience.  
Now the parallel to this fruitfulness  
is another popular and familiar parable to us  
known as the parable of the sower.  
The parable of the sower who sowed his seeds  
in various kinds of soils and with different results.  
And the way Jesus concludes that parable  
in the gospel of Luke makes a stark contrast  
between fruitlessness and fruitfulness.

Listen to chapter eight, 14 and 15,  
where Jesus interprets this parable,  
as for what fell among thorns,  
they are those who hear as they go on their way,  
they are choked by the cares and riches  
and pleasures of life and their fruit does not mature.  
As for that in the good soil,  
they are those who hearing the word,  
hold it fast in an honest and good heart  
and bear fruit with patience.

So the contrast here is between that kind of hearer  
who hears the word but does not mature  
in his growth of fruit.

In the other parallels in Matthew and Mark,  
the fruit becomes dried and therefore is of no use.  
Whereas the seeds sown in the good soil,  
which Jesus here interprets as the honest and good heart,  
the seed grows, terminates and bear fruit.  
I'll state positively what that growth is,  
as the word is consistently received,  
obedience grows in time.

Habang kinatangap ansalita nangtuluitului  
angtag sunod hai luma lago sapana hon.  
As the word is consistently received, obedience,  
that's the perceptible sign of growth  
in receiving the word, you become obedient.

Now it is important to note that in the parable of the sower  
the constant is the seed.

There is no qualitative difference between the seed  
that is sown on those that did not grow,  
the kinds of soils that did not germinate  
or germinated only not to grow and mature in their fruit,  
and the seeds that were sown in the good soil,  
which not only germinated but bore fruit that lasted.

There's no difference in the quality of the seed.

The point of Jesus is clear.

The same word that is heard may come to hearts  
that are different, and their hearing is different,  
and therefore the perception of how the word impacted  
on their lives will be seen,  
whether they bear fruit of obedience or they do not.

And that is the question we need to ask.

As time passes, some will germinate.

Some will not germinate at all.

Others will germinate.  
But of those that germinate,  
there will be differences as more passage of time  
because some of those that germinated early  
will then dry up and bear no fruit.  
Their fruit will not mature.  
They will not ripen.  
But some that germinated would last  
because not that they received a different word,  
but rather they received it differently.  
That is then the determinant of growth.  
Jesus describes this as an honest and good heart.  
The state of the heart, as one hears the word,  
remains the determinant today of how the fruit will grow.  
And as to spiritual growth,  
there is the end of analogy with fruit-bearing seed  
because at least the fruit-bearing seed you can measure.  
But the growth spiritually from hearing the word  
is not something that is measurable.  
In other words, there is no way we can quantify  
in inches or weight how much one has grown spiritually.  
But while that is not measurable,  
I want to stress that it is perceptible.  
It can be seen in evidences.  
You can identify those Christians  
who are serious in hearing the word  
and you can perceive their growth  
in that they are growing in obedience.  
And the phrase I used in my point is  
they consistently receive the word.  
That is what Jesus is saying.  
Those who are hearing the tense he used in the original,  
they keep hearing.  
In the case of those others  
who may have terminated for a while  
but did not bear ripe fruit is  
there is no consistency in their hearing.  
When the heart is not honest,  
there may be some times when they will be hearing the word  
and then at other times they do not mind hearing the word  
and that cannot be a formula for growth.  
Growth happens when there is consistency  
in hearing the word of God.  
It is not growth if the seed is not received consistently.

There are counterfeits of growth today.  
There are people who think their growth should be seen  
in how much happy they are,  
in how much they can share their testimony,  
in claiming closeness to God,  
in claiming to be prayerful,  
in claiming to do this and that in the ministry,  
in becoming busy in their activities,  
but there is no word.

There is no word to be the foundation  
of whatever it is they do.

In other words, they do those things probably for a time  
because it is exciting or they do those things  
because it is expected of them,  
or they do those things because they have company,  
but they are not driven by the word.

And when one is doing anything, not driven by the word,  
whatever it is, it is not obedience.

And I see this in the happiness experts interviewed  
by Time Magazine.

Several of them were interviewed  
and they were given choices of activities  
that should make one happy.

There were nine activities,  
and only one had anything to do with God explicitly,  
and that is praying.

And of those interviewed,  
only 17% say that they give daily prayer  
a place for happiness.

That's less than two of 10.

And of those who are praying,  
we cannot tell, it's no longer in the interview,  
whether they are praying just to be happy  
or they are praying because they are really concerned  
for the kingdom of God, which is the concern of Jesus here.

And that is why the outlook on happiness of many today  
is so flawed, they think they can be happy  
just by their exercise, by their hobbies,  
by their activities with other people,  
but praying to God, that's too much of an old-fashioned idea  
to make anyone happy.

And that is why many are thinking that doing this or that  
is their claim to their spiritual growth  
when there is no word.



The question is, are you hearing the word?  
And hearing the word, it translates into obedience.  
It challenges us to reflect on that which you find  
most challenging to obey of the word of God.  
That's where you perceive your growth.  
There are certain things in the word  
that you may find quite easy to obey, but the question is,  
those hard things, those that will bring you out  
of your comfort zone, those that are difficult,  
those that are self-denying.  
You will know from last year, 2022,  
what you found most challenging to obey in the word of God.  
For some of you, it may be coming to faith in Christ.  
Romans 6:17 calls that faith as obedience of faith  
and you have yet to believe in Christ at the end of 2022  
and you are given this another year  
to cast your faith in Christ.  
And as I appealed last week, do not delay.  
That is your obedience.  
But for those of you who are new to the faith,  
professing to be a believer, the first obedience  
that is exhorted by the New Testament  
is that you be baptized so that you may become  
part of his church.  
Have you done that in the year 2022?  
If not, you are given this opportunity.  
You cannot be wiser than God and say, I'll be a soul winner,  
I'll be a praying man or woman,  
I'll join some activities that help people.  
Certainly, God will be pleased when God is saying,  
my first command to you is that you be baptized  
and become part of the church.  
You are not obeying if by the end of 2022,  
you claim to be a Christian  
and yet do not belong to a church.  
And for those of us who are long in the faith,  
we all have that issue of obedience  
that is like a dislocated bone.  
You touch it and it hurts.  
What is that to you?  
Is it discipline praying?  
You try to be a prayerful man and woman,  
but you just find it so difficult to discipline yourself  
so that there is a time for you to regularly pray

as a matter of discipline, not mood.  
Is it consistent meditation on the word?  
And some of you may be joining us online  
and your difficulty is to obey the command  
not to forsake the assembling of God's people together.  
You can do it, you can attend,  
but you keep absent in yourself without excuse  
or you find excuses  
and you attend perhaps now and then  
and you think God should be thankful  
that you grace with your presence  
the assembly that he has commanded all his people  
to be part of.

You think that is obedience?

It is not.

Perhaps you are thinking this is not a threat  
on my salvation, is it?

I cannot answer that.

It may be, it may not be.

Because it may prove that you're not a Christian  
just like the seeds sown in the thorny ground  
that germinated but really by the lack of fruit  
proved that it was not an honest and good heart.

Or it may yet be something that happens to a true believer  
and we are not questioning your salvation.

But you are lowering the bar of your motive  
if you do not obey without any dread  
that you are going to lose your salvation.

That truly is a very low bar for a Christian motive.

Instead resolve that you will start  
the gradual growth of obedience in that very area  
which is your challenge.

Is it family worship?

You find it difficult?

It's easier to worship alone, I know that.

But if you are the head of the family  
you need to lead the family in worship  
apart from the church.

Do you do that?

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is a pattern of obedience  
of discipleship.

Obedience for Jesus meant dying on the cross.  
And that's what Philippians 2:6 following tells us.  
He became obedient, obedient even unto death.

God will brook no compromise when it comes to obedience.  
Either you obey and you obey  
because you receive the word or you are not obedient.  
How is your spiritual growth in the year 2022?  
And when you face this year,  
make that your resolve to grow in that very area  
where you know you have been deficient of in the last year.  
One such challenging obedience I might have told you  
several times already was the missionary couple,  
Adoniram Judson and his wife Anne.  
They were sent as missionaries by the congregationalists  
from the United States to sail to India.  
And as they were sailing it took months during those days  
to get from America to Asia.  
And while they were sailing,  
they were expecting to meet with the Baptist missionary  
William Carey.  
And so what they did was to prepare by studying baptism.  
As congregationalists they were infant sprinklers  
and they were going to meet a Baptist  
who believes in immersing only believers.  
So they started the Bible so they can prepare  
for unexpected debate.  
But as the base of this passage of this book during those,  
that period as they studied,  
they became more and more convinced that baptism  
is indeed immersion of believers.  
Now they were in a dilemma.  
Should they obey, which means that will be  
cutting off their ties to their supporting churches  
back in America?  
Or should they just keep their tradition  
and let go of the world?  
And by the time they reached India,  
they have come to the conclusion they will obey.  
And indeed their support was cut off.  
But they became missionaries anyway,  
ending up in Burma, which is now Myanmar.  
And it was under William Carey himself  
that they were baptized as believers.  
That's obedience.  
What is it that is that kind of challenge to you?  
Reception of the word yielding obedience  
is one mode of growth.

The second is devotion to the church, driving fellowship.  
The parallel verse about fruitfulness to our passage,  
and it is important because it also speaks of the fig tree,  
is 643 and 44 of the Gospel of Luke.

It says, no good tree bears bad fruit,  
nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit,  
for each tree is known by its fruit,  
for figs are not gathered from turned bushes, et cetera.

What is the sense of that reference to fruit?

If you read the context, it is about speaking  
to one another.

There are those who speak judgmentally.

They judge even though there is much more of fault  
on their part, but they judge in their speaking  
against their brethren.

And towards the end of this discourse,  
Jesus would say, from the abundance of the heart,  
the mouth speaks.

So the growth that is being referred to by Jesus  
in this figure is the way we deal with one another.

And that way of dealing with one another  
is most perceived in the way we talk to each other,  
our fellowship.

Let me make this premise that every Christian should accept.

The church is the context of fruitfulness  
in fellowship with brethren.

And Iglesia and contexto nang paglago,  
nang pamumunga, sapaki ke pagugnayanat in sakapathiran.

This is the immediate context of the saying of Jesus.

It pertains to those who are judgmental of their brethren.

And he states the principle out of the abundance  
of the heart, the mouth speaks.

The fruit bearing in view here is the fellowship  
of the community of God's people.

And that fellowship is most perceived  
in the way they talk to each other.

If that talking is characterized by judgmentalism,  
fault-finding, destructive criticism,  
that is bearing bad fruit.

And that bad fruit is only a manifestation of a bad heart.

That's what Jesus is saying.

But the context, you see, is you grow in the diversity  
of brethren you encounter and you fellowship  
within the church.

For those who do not like the problem of diversity of personalities and temperaments, they stay away. They would rather be isolated. They do not have the problem of other personalities impinging on their lives, no problem of relationship, but they are not being obedient. Because obedience is to be part of the church. And there your growth is going to be tested because that's where your love is going to show itself either in its deficiency or abundance. Your patience and those other graces where we should grow in they are tested and challenged in the context of the fellowship of God's people most perceptively in the way we talk to each other. That's the context of the church. And our talk is truly an extension of what the heart is. How easily it exposes the real nature of the heart, what you have in abundance in your heart, it spills over into the way you talk. How easy it is to leap into judgment, to find the verdicts of guilty, forgetful of how guilty you are yourself and sinful. And we often become contemptuous of those who we think are more sinful. Isn't that the context of the parable of the fig tree? The crowd was asking Jesus, they suffered tragically, they must be more sinful. We always are on the lookout for someone worse than us, because that's the way to make us feel good. But there is no place for that in the fellowship of the people of God. How artfully we can shape our words to sound so concerned if even when we are so contemptuous. And the Apostle Paul has this advice in the way we talk to each other in Colossians 4 verse 6, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. It means let your speaking, let your speech be dripping with grace, pleasant. And there are times, yes, that we need to rebuke and inflict the fateful wound of a friend. But even that is out of a heart with abundance of grace. There is a creature that we call the pistol shrimp. And its characteristic, which is quite uncanny, is that it can snap its claws at a speed of 60 miles per hour

that's faster than when I drive.  
And its sound has been measured as 210 decibels.  
It is actually louder than gunfire,  
except that it is muffled because it is under the sea.  
And there are some tongues like that, sharp,  
like a gunfire, but muffled by the atmosphere of the church.  
And because it is in the church,  
it can be couched in religious terms,  
it can be couched as a language of concern,  
but it is dripping with contempt.  
It is meant to hurt.  
And that's the growth of fruit that Jesus is seeking  
among his followers.  
Again, it challenges us, confront the tough duties  
of Christian love with the most self-denying exercise  
in our speech.  
Hara pinmo ama yihirapna tungkuli nam Christianu pagibig  
lalu nam pagtangisa sarili saatim angapananalita.  
This is why I call this fruit bearing  
as devotion to the church.  
Without that devotion, self will take priority  
and you begin to massage yourself with something  
that will soothe you and sometimes in our selfishness,  
it soothes us if we can hurt someone who has hurt us.  
And again, there is no place for that  
in the fellowship of the people of God.  
Those who have offended are too proud sometimes  
to even make a step of penitence  
when they know they should and they don't.  
It's too self-denying.  
There is always the pride that find the impermeable excuse  
to justify the most unjustifiable.  
So you would rather go on in your proud and arrogant stance  
of not being bothered than to love.  
And that loving may mean for you to humble yourself  
and seek forgiveness.  
But the offended one, your first instinct may be  
to stay away from the church than to love.  
So you see, both offender and offended  
have this they often use from the abundance of the heart  
their mouth speaks.  
You know how you used your mouth or your tongue  
in the year 2022.  
And thank God, the spirit for every fruit of the tongue

that has been for life and for good of others,  
the comforted others in their sorrow,  
spoke gently to those who are down  
and sought reconciliation where there is conflict.  
But perhaps the year 2022, you found your tongue  
becoming a tool for hurtful language.

And we have another year.

Jesus is the supreme model of that gentle voice  
of the gospel, inviting sinners, restoring the fallen.

And we sometimes feel we can grow more  
if only without some people in the church.

I'll grow more if I don't see that brother or sister,  
if his life or my life would not impinge upon one another,  
perhaps there will be more growth.

But that in fact is your challenge to growth.

When you have to encounter that which challenges you to love  
and to be humble, to forgive, seek forgiveness  
and to be forgiving.

On this date, January 15th, the year 1697,  
the state of Massachusetts called for a day of fasting  
and repentance.

It was following what became one of the darkest bloods  
in Christian history, known as the Salem Witch Hunt.

When people were just accused on the mere words of minors,  
and then it just went around,

the gossip prevailed over the town of Salem  
and by the end of that period, 19 were hanged  
just because they were suspected as witch.

There's no more witch hunting today,  
at least not in the urbanized civilization.

But there's still that same tongue  
that can hang others if they could.

And that's where we need to grow.

So I challenge you brethren, there's another year.

Are we going to grow?

Grow in obedience, grow in fellowship.

There's one thing you will need to note about the parable.

It is unfinished.

And Jesus is quite often in his parables,  
giving parables that are unfinished.

The parable of the prodigal son,  
you do not know what the elder brother did  
after he was confronted by the father.

And so here, you do not know.

Well, you want to know what happened after a year.

Well, the parable remains unfinished  
and I think Jesus is exactly doing that  
because he wants his hearers to finish it.

Finish the parable.

He's seeking another year of fruitfulness in your life,  
in obedience, fruitfulness in our church, in fellowship.

And the question is, will it finish well with a fig tree  
being tenderly cared for again and cultivated and growing,  
or will it end cut off as threatened by the owner,  
consented to by the vine dresser?

How will you finish this parable?

Well, I hope we can all pray at least  
that this year will mean more holiness for us,  
more of the graces we need  
so that we may truly bear fruit in the year 2023.

We will respond with that hymn, more holiness give me.

As you can see, every line begins with more.

And that probably summarizes what growth is, more.

What is it that you need more  
in terms of all the graces that are here mentioned,  
sorrow for sin, sense of scare, more gratitude, more purity?

What is it that we need to be more of fruit  
in the year 2023?

Let us sing this as our prayer, more holiness give me.

It's close in prayer.

Our great God and gracious heavenly Father,  
we thank you indeed for your goodness to us  
in extending our lives and as an extension of your mercy.

It should be understood by us as another opportunity.

For some, it is another opportunity for salvation  
and may they not delay and even now come to Christ  
for that is the only way of salvation.

But for those of us who are in Christ,  
this is another year of opportunity for us to grow,  
for we must grow.

We are expected to grow with duration of time  
and that growth cannot be measured in quantity,  
yet it is perceptible.

It is perceived through obedience  
as we receive the word consistently.

We pray, Lord, that we may in this year, 2023,  
show real consistency in the reception of the word.

We pray that those who have not shown that consistency



may truly be convicted and make it their result.  
That this will be a year when the reception of the word  
will not be moody, will not be fickle,  
will not be off and on, but rather consistent.  
And when there is reception of the word  
that is consistent, the perceptive growth  
is to be seen in obedience to that word.  
We pray, Lord, that our activities will not be driven  
by the desire to be seen or just driven  
by emotional excitement or whatever sentiment may prevail,  
but rather our obedience is one that is disciplined  
by the word of God and help that as a church,  
we also may grow for you have designed  
that growth must occur, not in solitude,  
but in the context of that relationship of brethren  
in the local church.  
And that relationship is characterized by diversity  
and many times that very diversity  
is the one that hinders many from growing  
as other personalities and impediments and backgrounds  
impinge on them, they are provoked rather than they love.  
We ask, Lord, that we may bear that fruit  
that Jesus is seeking, that fruit which shows  
the abundance of the heart and the mouth will speak  
and may our speech to one another be characterized  
by grace that is seasoned with soul.  
So help us, Lord, to confront those tough duties  
of loving one another that often demands self-denial  
in the way we treat one another  
in the way we speak to one another.  
And we pray that we may be mortified  
that quickness to judge, that quickness to find fault.  
For those who offend, may they have the humility  
to seek forgiveness.  
For those who are offended,  
give them the readiness for reconciliation.  
For we are followers of the Lord Jesus.  
It is that Jesus who in our text is on his way  
to Jerusalem to die on the cross, suffer for sinners  
and rise from the dead to complete the gospel.  
May we be true followers in whom we'll be perceived  
obedience and the love of fellowship.  
And as we see this parable is left unfinished,  
we pray that we may finish it in our own lives

and show that the fig tree will be bearing fruit  
and will be taken care of  
and continue to be a blessing on others.  
So make us to be such growing believers  
in a growing church.  
And now may the love of the Father,  
the grace of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all evermore.  
In Jesus' name we pray all these things.  
Amen.