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**Title:** Good Enough: Not So Fast

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**Text:** [Luke 13:1-9](#)

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We are in a worship series called Good Enough: Embracing An Imperfect Life and Faith. We have been exploring this idea that we are drawn to a version of the good life that is not realistic or possible, and in some ways not faithful to God. While we get busy pursuing this version of the Good Life, we miss the ways we are already living the good

life. That our lives and our faith, while imperfect, are good enough.

I was reminded this week of this quote from Thomas Merton: *"People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall."* In this season of Lent, we are working on making sure that our ladder is leaning against the right wall.

Last week, we got the notice we have been waiting on for the last few months. We got the good news that we have been waiting to be blessed with ever since we heard it might be possible. Fiber speed internet is available in our neighborhood. Okay, it was the news I was waiting for. The fastest internet speed possible. No more occasional waiting on buffering on Netflix. Everything at my fingertips at the fastest speed possible. We live in an instant world, don't we? We expect everything to happen now, immediately. As I was thinking about Fiber internet, it took me back around 25 years ago, which is the big picture of history, is not that long ago. Many homes were getting home internet for the first time, through the phone line. You received the AOL disc that would be put in the disc drive of the computer. You had that great noise as you waited to get online. If you waited several minutes, you were online...unless, of course, someone was on the home phone line.

That seemed very fast at the time, didn't it? Wait a few minutes and you had a world of information at your fingertips. It wasn't that long ago. More and more, in new ways, we live in a culture and a world that values speed. A world that values the instant. A world that values the quickest result.

The Gospel doesn't understand life quite that way. One of the prominent images in the Gospel of Luke is a fig tree. The readers of the gospel of Luke and the followers of Jesus would understand the fig tree because they lived in an agricultural world. It was an image they would connect with and understand.

John the Baptist uses the image of a fig tree in calling people to repentance. In his sermon on the plain, Jesus uses the image of a fig tree as an example of good fruit and bad fruit. And on his journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, Jesus uses a fig tree in a parable.

*"Jesus told this parable: "A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He said to his gardener, 'Look, I've come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I've never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil's nutrients?' The gardener responded, 'Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'" Luke 13:6-9 CEB*

A parable in the Bible is meant to change our perspective. It takes the way the world works and challenges us to think about how God desires the world to work. This fig tree had not produced figs for three years and in one sense is simply taking up space. The gardener convinces the landowner to give the fig tree just a little more time.

Here is the fundamental question I think this parable is asking us to consider: Are we bearing fruit or are we just taking up space? To truly understand this question, we need to first change our perspective. This is where the idea of repentance comes in. In Mark's Gospel, the first gospel believed to be composed, Jesus announces his presence on the scene by pronouncing *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."* Mark 1:14b NRSV

In the First Testament, repentance is spoken in terms of returning from exile and turning to God. The roots of the Greek word for repentance mean to "go beyond the mind that we have.

The way we see the world in our mind's eye is socialized in a particular time and place. It's how our expectations of others and how the world works are created. It's how we get our definition of what is good enough and what is the good life. To go beyond the mind that we have is to see past our current circumstances and see in a new way- a way shaped by God and known so decisively in Jesus.

Most, if not all of us, have been trained to see a fig tree that produces nothing for three years as just taking up space. The gardener knows differently. The gardener in Jesus' parable sees differently. Not bound to conventional definitions and ways of seeing, rather seeing with God's vision. He knows the fig tree can and will bear fruit. Turns out humanity has always been impatient. Turns out we have always had very little patience for transformation. Very little patience for God's inbreaking and working in our lives.

In 1818 a civil engineer named William Cubitt wanted to address a perplexing social problem in prisons. He wanted to give people who were incarcerated something to do with their time and give them some sort of job training. Cubitt was the son of a miller and he invented what was known as a treadwheel. It was a massive paddle wheel set beside a platform where the incarcerated would step up on an endless staircase that rose before them and turned the milling wheel. Some days they would ground corn or pump water but many days the wheel did nothing. Monotony would set in, along with isolation and loneliness. The wheel became known as the treadmill rather than the treadwheel. Finally, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its use was discounted as society deemed it a form of torture that people had to spend their time doing something that had no meaning and no human connection.

Today, when we say, "we want to get off the treadmill," we are saying that we want meaningful lives. We are also saying we want to live in a new way, a way where it doesn't feel like we are climbing an endless staircase as fast as we can or an endless ladder as fast as we can, only to discover that ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

I know I have done this; in fact, I know I still do it. We get on the treadmill, and we go faster and faster and we become less and less patient. And we think we are getting closer and closer to finding the life we have always wanted. Productivity experts will tell us what is wrong with us and sell us the antidote in three amazing sessions that will completely turn our lives around and give you your best life now.

Jesus asks us to repent of that time of thinking. Jesus asked people long ago to repent of that type of thinking. What he might be telling us today is that "in a microwave world, faith is best slow-baked."

Maybe the question makes more sense now.- Are you bearing fruit or are you taking up space?

It's why Jesus lifts this fig tree. In one perspective, the fig tree is not immediately productive, doesn't have it all figured out, and to the landowner is just taking up space.

That's one perspective. However, God has another perspective.

Give it time. The tree is doing the necessary work to bear fruit. Bearing fruit is not fast work nor is its easy work. It is meaningful work. Give it the time and space it needs to do the work it needs to do to bear fruit.

One perspective says the tree is simply taking up space

But another perspective says that it is bearing fruit even if that is not apparent.

We are to repent, repent that is worthy of God's perspective. Reframe from the way our culture thinks and sees, to the way God sees. Seeing God's way.

As we move toward the cross, we remember that the cross is not merely an instrument of Roman punishment, but in God's perspective is now a symbol of liberation and new life.

It is okay, more than okay, each of us must step off the treadmill.

God's love and grace come without a price. With that knowledge, we can do the work we need to do.

Repent. Change your way of thinking. Go beyond your current way of seeing the world around you. Change your way of living to the way that is worthy of God. Then watch, as you bear the fruit of the kingdom of God with your life.

AMEN.