

# **The Parable of The Fig Tree**

## **Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann**

### **West Valley Presbyterian Church**

SERMON FOR AUGUST 16<sup>th</sup> 2015: (withering of the fig tree)  
A SONG FOR EVERY SEASON

<sup>12</sup> The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup> Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it....

Mark 11:12-14 (NIV)

Today we are talking about seasons of life.

Now you may wonder why Jesus cursed the fig tree – withered it right up – even though it wasn't the season for figs. Jesus ...that's kind of mean!

The fig tree wasn't doing anything wrong. It was just being a fig tree. Doing business as usual. Let's look for a minute on what being a fig tree actually looks like. We don't have fig trees here in Cupertino.





Why would Jesus wither up a perfectly good tree?

First off, always take scripture in context. Danielle Steele, best selling author of all time says this..." **People have entire relationships via text message now, but I am not partial to texting. I need context, nuance and the warmth and tone that can only come from a human voice.**

Same thing with scripture. God talks to us out of the context, not just simply one verse here or there.

Christian plaques are great, but often misinterpreted when you hang them on the wall because taken out of context they can mean something entirely different than what you meant it to mean.

Well, in context what's the next thing Jesus does? Who has it on their cell phone or in their Bible?

He goes into the temple and starts driving out money changers and overturning tables in the temple. Why?

Because the temple wasn't bearing fruit. The withering of the fig tree was a parable that illustrated the state of God's temple. It was devoid of fruit that glorified God.

*That's why the fig tree happens right before the cleansing of the temple. The emptiness of the fig tree with no fruit symbolized the emptiness of the temple that was not bearing fruit for God but rather using God's house to make a profit.*

*And then Matthew tells us, "Learn the lesson from the fig tree...when leaves start to sprout, you know that summer is near."*

*Look at the signs. You see the people in the temple missed Jesus coming to them. They didn't know it was the season of visitation from God himself.*

*So I want to shift a bit to a more practical way to apply this parable and ask you to look at your life. What season are you in? I am not talking about physical/temporal age and stage categories.*

But in terms of our *spiritual lives* – how close do you feel to God, how far away?

How sure we are of our faith, or how doubtful...

How encouraged are you about what God is doing, or how discouraged are you about what you think God should be doing... and isn't

We experience these highs and lows and inbetween places in our relationship to God. Let's be honest. We all go through seasons in our faith...

If you can imagine that we are all fig trees, the truth is that no matter what season it is, no matter how spiritually up or down we feel, we can still bear fruit because the HS lives inside of us and God never changes. And whatever season we are experiencing...Jesus comes to us right now and says, "What fruit are you bearing for me?"

I was at a Willow Creek Conference this past week where Bill Hybels talked about how so often in his spiritual journey of many seasons, there would be a song that the HS would give to him...a song that made all the difference for whatever season he was in.

And it helped him to hang on, to bear fruit, to know how great God was no matter what the circumstances were.

And I thought in honor of Anton's last day we would focus on some of those songs for different seasons. I am focusing on the hymns only because many of you know them and they have great theology...

Bill Hybels was saying that...

Sometimes a certain song that the HS would give him would help him celebrate, and articulate joy in a way that he could never have thought up on his own.

Some of the words to the old hymns are so deep and so profound...and they express things with such richness ...

And then he said, In hard seasons, there would always be a song that would help him hold onto God in the midst of his turmoil and fear.

Often he will pray, what is the song for this season Lord, that I need? ...so that no matter what I am going through Lord...I will never cease to praise you...I will never cease to bear fruit because you O Lord inhabit...live in...the praises of your people...and as I look to you in this season...no matter what the circumstances I am focusing UPWARD not OUTWARD Singing and praise does that, to us, right?

It keeps from being withered old fig trees...because in any season we can bear fruit because God is worthy to be praised, and when I look up, I automatically bear fruit in any season because I am automatically connected to God.

### **(Season of Joy – Image)**

So lets first take the season of JOY...there are days when we are so full of joy and celebration that we can hardly contain ourselves.

Life is good, and bright, and full of blessing.

When we are in these seasons, we want to sing and praise God. We can't hold it in...it just bubbles up inside of us.

Maybe you had that kind of experience when you first became a Christian. You were so enthusiastic and God's love was so awesome...you just told everybody (and probably turned a bunch of people off) but you contain your joy.

Or maybe it was the birth of your first child or grandchild...and you realize what a gift from God he or she is...

There are seasons like that in our spiritual lives that are just the best! We're popping figs out all over the place...we are bearing fruit for the Lord just because we are so excited about him. We love him so much...We've got energy and enthusiasm...A song for this spiritual season? *Praise to the Lord the Almighty the King of Creation...*

*Oh...my soul praise him...for he is your help and salvation!*

*Ponder anew...*

That means...think all over again

*What the Almighty can do*

What God is capable of! If you think about that very long, you will actually get excited...folks We have a great big God...on our side...who does amazing things

Let's sing a song for that season of joy together (**Praise to the Lord the Almighty, vs 1,2**)  
So great!

-----  
**(Season of Loss - IMAGE)**

But we don't always feel so great.

There are other times, like seasons of loss.

Losing a loved one is so hard!

Or maybe you have lost a job, or a relationship, or just lost a sense of God's presence in your life for whatever reason.

The world goes gray. We are going through the motions, time seems to collapse and it feels as if we are surviving not living. 1 in every 4 people in any group has at one time struggled with depression. And we may be doing all the right things to feel better but we are still stuck in the muck of it and disappointed with God, or with ourselves and we can't figure it out the why of things.

One of the best songs for this season of loss is the song "It is well with my soul"

It was written by Horatio Spafford (1828-1888). He was a wealthy Chicago lawyer with a thriving legal practice, a beautiful home, a wife, four daughters and a son. He was also a devout Christian / faithful student of the Scriptures/ friend of DL MOODY back then the famous evangelist.

At the very height of his financial and professional success, Horatio and his wife Anna suffered the loss of their young son. Then a few months later, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed almost every real estate investment that Spafford had.

So, In 1873, Spafford schedules a boat trip to Europe in order to give his wife and daughters a much needed vacation (he stays behind to tend to some business and time to recover from the tragedy. Several days later he received notice that his family's ship had

encountered a collision. All four of his daughters drowned; only his wife had survived. Spafford boarded a boat that would take him to his grieving wife in England.

It was on this trip that he penned those now famous words, *When sorrows like sea billows roll; it is well, it is well with my soul.*

It takes some faith to sing it when we are in this state because when we feel this way we have no way to explain the depths...and yet this song tells us that somehow in all the unexplained pain, God is still holding us...and somehow in some way...we will make it through. Even in his agony, by writing these words Spafford bore fruit in the midst of his crisis because these words have helped hundreds of thousands down through the generations...Lets sing together...

### **(IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL)**

---

#### **(The Season of Gratitude – IMAGE)**

Then there are seasons of Gratitude where it just seems we can see God all around us.

We are filled with awe and wonder and with the psalmist we want to proclaim, “ How wonderful are your thoughts O God, how vast is the sum of them!” (Psalm 139:7)

Maybe God has answered a prayer for you and you are so grateful. I just talked with Karen Eshoff this past week – thanks for giving me permission to share this Karen.

She told me that after much struggle she prayed with a friend who told her to close her eyes and see Jesus on the cross...and she said as she prayed she felt an actual weight was lifted off of her shoulders . She was so grateful!

Maybe you have been encouraged by a circumstance like that, or perhaps you are simply in a peaceful state where you can take in the mystery of life with awe and wonder and also be astounded by the fact that the very One who created you and all of life is your *very own Abba, Father*...who lifts burdens off of your shoulders...

Do you ever think like that? Do you recognize that God the Creator is your very own Parent who has you very much in mind as his beloved child?

A song that is full of gratitude is the song “**This is My Father’s World**”---  
It’s a song that echoes with awe and wonder and is perfect for that wonderful season of gratitude (lets sing together)

---

#### **(Season of Transition – IMAGE)**

I am going to close with the season of transitions. Transitions work better for some than for others.

Some like change more than others.

West Valley Presbyterian Church, we have been in a state of transition from PCUSA to ECO and we are still feeling the weight and the goodness of that change.

I just want to tell you what a wonderful Session you have.

We are going to be sharing with you a bright new vision in September that our Moving

Forward Team has put together and I am so excited about it

We have had major staff transition and that's been hard; but its coming together in very exciting ways that we will be sharing with you in the next couple of Sundays...God has definitely been providing...

We also have transitioned into having an after school program that is rocking and rolling – and is a huge outreach for our community

We have transitioned from just a couple kids straggling over from Hyde Middle School – to a program this year that is structured and that we have hired three staff for...and for which many of you are volunteering

There were times when we doing CZ with just a couple kids that we thought..."Is this really God's calling? Did we hear him wrong?"

Cause sometimes transitions take awhile – and you aren't sure what the future holds – and you just have to wait, which is not my strong suit...

But when you are following God, and doing the best you can to listen these seasons of transition, when steeped in prayer, bring amazing results

This year it looks like we are going to MAX out at 50 kids from the community, here on site, M-TH with parents in the community saying to us, "Can't you please run your program on Fridays too?"

Wow.

In addition to church transitions, there are personal transitions going on in so many lives right now in our congregation. Some of you have new jobs. New marriages are happening. Others of you are trying to take care of aging family members and wondering how or when to transition them out of their home to another facility if that's needed. Some of you are transitioning from High School to college, or from middle school to high school.

In all transitions, change is inevitable. And yet God is unchanging. One of the great songs for the Seasons of Transition is the song "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Will you sing it with me, in faith and in hope now?

(Sing Great Is Thy Faithfulness)

Let Us Pray...

Praise To The Lord: Verses 1,3 (JOY)

Great Is Thy Faithfulness: Verse 1 (TRANSITION)

It Is Well With My Soul: Verses 1,3 (LOSS)

This is My Father's world: Verses 1,2 (GRATITUDE)

Point: Stay alert to what season it is in your life! Get what you need to get through it. Often you can find a song that will help you celebrate or cope with whatever it is that is going on.