

Palm Sunday
Faith and Forgiveness
Pastor Morgan Murray
West Valley Church

Theme: Forgiving others sets us free to trust God for greater things

This story takes place two days after the triumphal entry.

Mark 11:20-25 (NIV)

20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" 22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

This story is included in both Matthew and Mark's gospels, but Mark connects Bold Trusting with Urgent Forgiving.

Forgiving others sets us free to trust God for greater things.

But before we can look at that connection, we have to deal with the two big problems that distract us.

First problem: Why is Jesus mean to that poor fig tree?

The fig tree – full of green leaves but bearing none of the fruit that should accompany those leaves – is a symbol for what Jesus has encountered in Jerusalem.

Jesus isn't just condemning fruitlessness but showy fruitlessness.

This is the only penal miracle in the Gospels, showing Jesus as a gentle judge who doesn't exact the penalty on showy fruitless people (such as in the Temple cleansing a few verses earlier).

Second problem: If I've prayed and NOT received, NOT moved mountains, is it my fault for not believing it enough?

Everyone who has asked and NOT received feels a knot in their stomach. The silent accusation "you didn't have enough faith" wounds us.

Jesus encourages his marveling disciples to believe their words and prayers can have a "moving" effect on the world (symbolized by the mountain) as his own Word had on the fig tree. Jesus knows that if he can leave his disciples with a confidence in knowing how to pray, he will leave them with almost everything they need. Where praying thrives, churches live.

Unforgiveness is a block to faith-filled prayer. Why?

Jesus' story and his promises are intended to encourage us to throw ourselves into confident prayer. But unforgiveness undermines that confidence.

When we are asking, our own sin is probably the first thing that comes up. We start asking and wonder about our worthiness. Why should God answer this prayer when I am so obviously lazy or selfish? I'm not good enough, my motives aren't pure enough, for God to answer my prayer. I need forgiveness.

Oh! Jesus says. In that case, you gotta prime the pump, remember? Forgive others – whatever you are holding against someone else, lay that down. Then your hands will be free to receive the sure knowledge that God is going to respond to your request on the basis of grace and not some false notion of worthiness.

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