

## Interactive lesson



*pictures from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/assorted-sliced-fruits-1128678/> and <https://www.pexels.com/photo/assorted-fruits-stall-709567/>*

What is your favorite fruit? <Let them respond>

Is that everyone's favorite? <Let them respond>

Why is fruit good? <Let them respond>

Can you eat other parts of a fruit plant, besides the fruit? <Let them respond>

For its best use, a fruit plant needs to produce fruit. Do most fruit plants produce fruit just once? <Let them respond>

If you saw a fruit plant without fruit on it today, would you assume it is a bad plant? <Let them respond>

Just as fruit plants have a growing cycle, many people cycle through different periods of spiritual productivity. Is it frustrating when you want to have their spiritual fruit, and someone is not currently producing it? <Let them respond>

How can you tell what season of their faith someone is in? <Let them respond>

When do you think you are most spiritually fruitful? <Let them respond>

Have you ever given up on somebody, or had someone give up on you, because of unmet expectations?

<Let them respond>

How can we help one another be more spiritually fruitful? <Let them respond>

God nurtures us, that we may grow in our faith. God has patience to help us bear fruits of the Spirit; let us also help one another patiently, bearing fruit of our own in Christ's love.

### Gospel lesson

This Gospel reading comes at the end of a lengthy discourse Jesus gave, aimed at getting people to change their mindset from a worldly view to a more Godly view.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-barren-figtree/>

**Luke 13:1-9**

(NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

<sup>2</sup> He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"

<sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.

<sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?

<sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.

<sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?'

<sup>8</sup> He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.

<sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "A Charge to Keep I Have" UMH #413>

## Message: If It Bears Fruit



pictures from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/gathered-up-in-jesus>

Please pray with me?

Beautiful Savior, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may bear fruit in the outpouring of Your love. Amen.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/gathered-up-in-jesus/third-sunday-in-lent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-in-lent-year-c-graphics>

Today brings us to “If It Bears Fruit.”

“The Christ who gathers us up invites us to live a life of fruitfulness. That’s the call hidden in our text for this week. The text starts with questions about blame, about getting what is deserved. Jesus wants to change the conversation.

Like a poem from Mary Oliver, he is asking us “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?””



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/london-new-york-tokyo-and-moscow-clocks-48770/>

Last week, we moved the clocks ahead an hour for

Daylight Savings Time. After the Administrative Board meeting following the service at South Otselic, I went around the church building to set most of the clocks to the correct time.

As I went through rooms that have not been used much in the past year, I found about five clocks that had just stopped working. What a waste of effort to set the time on clocks that would not stay accurate!

And yet, do we not do that with much of our efforts? We adjust things in the moment for how we like them, not really thinking about sustaining things in a healthy manner for the long-term.

When hungry, we may binge on snacks that are not the best for our bodies. Binge-watching shows is a thing; and how often do we procrastinate what needs to be done, only to rush around later trying to catch up? How well do you think we do things when in a hurry?

It is a normal human tendency to try to satisfy immediate wants. All through history there are examples of people doing things for the short-term that do not help them in the long-term.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jvh-moses/>

Isaiah asked the exiled Israelites why they spent their money unwisely and worked for “that which does not satisfy.” Paul warned the Corinthians not to become idolators and immoral like the Israelites who followed Moses in the desert, because the temptation was also present for them in the days of the early church. Jesus too warned people about short-term thinking, using the owner of the vineyard as an example. The vineyard owner was giving up on the fig tree, but those trees do not normally produce fruit within three years. The gardener knew better.

God knows what our needs and wants are, knows what is best for us, and provides for us. Isaiah called for sinners to repent and seek the Lord, who shows mercy, abundantly pardoning those who truly repent, supplying rich food. But do not expect that to come in the form you think – God’s “thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways [God’s] ways.”



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/inspirational-quote-spelled-out-with-board-game-letter-tiles-6842434/>

Jesus in His discourse sought for people to change their way of thinking. In a time when common social wisdom equated bad fortune with sinfulness and blessings with righteousness, Jesus taught the crowd not to dismiss others as sinful or unworthy just because bad things happened to them.

Should I have thrown away all those clocks that were not running? No! I checked their batteries first; all but one started running nicely with a good battery replacing the old, depleted battery. Only the one that did not work with a new battery was discarded.

How quick are we to dismiss someone after they disappoint our expectations? Do we understand how God is working with them, maybe even calling us to help them develop further, to recharge their batteries?



*picture from MMMS personal collection*

Do we understand when we need recharging ourselves? The psalmist understood that our souls thirst for God, and when we cling to God, our spirits feast. Isaiah tells of the plenty that comes in covenant with God. Paul wrote that with our testing, God provides a way out for us to endure it.

Does that mean it will be easy? No! For great troubles, likely it will take a long time and much effort to come out the other side of it. What is more, we are NOT expected to deal with it alone.

First and foremost, we should turn to God. I put in the newsletter this month some suggestions for spiritual disciplines that can help us connect with God, to recharge spiritually and emotionally. If you

have not already started one, try to this week. Make it about God and getting to know God better.

Other people are human too. In God's grace, they can produce fruit of the Spirit too. Since God helps us to focus our time, money, and other resources on what is healthy for us and for our community, I want you to look for how God is working through others around you. Let them show God's grace by helping you.

Consider also how you might nurture them, help them recharge their batteries. Do NOT assume that you know what is good for them before talking to them about where they are at, what their expectations and hopes are, what God is calling for and what they are willing to do. What you think is obvious might be entirely wrong, like those who misjudged the Galileans.



*pictures from*

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-reaching-for-banana-fruit-983466/>,  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/toddler-standing-beside-green-leafed-plant-holding-fruit-1468002/>, and  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/diverse-female-gardeners-harvesting-fruits-in-garden-6231704/>

Just as different kinds of fruit trees produce different kinds of fruit, people produce fruits of the Spirit based on who they are, on their individual gifts. Let the Holy Spirit bring forth unexpected blessings by helping others work toward **their** dreams.



In Jesus's parable, the tree was expected to produce fruit in order to be of use. The clocks I reset are expected to keep time in order to be of use. As Christians, we are expected to share the love of Christ with others to be of use.

Next week during our God moments, I want to hear about how each of you recharged, how you helped others recharge, and how you shared the love of Christ with others in your life.

Let us now confess in prayer to our glorious God.

#### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**O God of everflowing grace, you fill our every need.**

**You nurture us as your own beloved, but we do not bear fruit. We are never satisfied.**

**We seek out the comforts of this earth and do dishonor to you, the Giver of every good gift.**

**We are liable for judgement, for our guilt is great.**

**Spare your wrath from falling on us, O merciful God.**

**Forgive our sin and free us to follow with joy in your righteous ways. Amen.**

*<excerpt from: Timothy J. Crouch, OSL, Nancy B. Parks, OSL, Chris E.*

*Visminas, Mark R. Babb, OSL, And Also With You: Worship Resources Based on the Revised Common Lectionary Year C (OSL Publications, 1994), 51.>*

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

**The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**

*<1 Timothy 1:15>*

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!  
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Having confessed our sins and reassured by God's  
grace, let us affirm our faith with

**THE NICENE CREED**

UMH #880

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven,

was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day He rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory

to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in the one holy catholic\* and apostolic church.  
We acknowledge one baptism *\*universal*  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### <Doxology>

### <Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Patient and merciful God, we bring our offerings  
humbly on this day, hoping they will bring fruit to  
the ministry of your church on earth.

We ourselves have not always set our priorities on  
bearing good fruit, and yet you are a patient  
gardener.

You have sent saints into our midst to make the soil  
richer, yet like the stubborn fig tree, good fruit  
has been scarce.

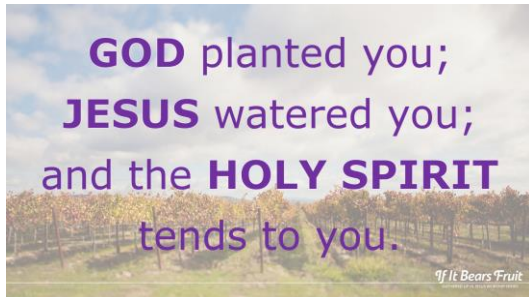
May our journey this Lenten season feed our spirits  
to bring forth the fruit you desire.

- Lord, please help the people of Ukraine who journey in exile from their homes due to the war.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
  - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
  - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
  - Family far off
  - Travelers
- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
- Thanks for
  - -
  - -

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray:  
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord"      UMH #438>

<Benediction>



*background picture from*  
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/gathered-up-in-jesus/third-sunday-in-lent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-in-lent-year-c-graphics>

Our Creator planted life within you.

Jesus our Christ watered you through baptism and His blood.

The Holy Spirit tends to you, nurturing your soul.

Thus cared for, go now into the world to bear the fruit of God's love. Amen.