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## *God is A Gardener!*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon David Boyd**  
**The Third Sunday in Lent – Year C**

It begins with a tragedy.  
Two, actually.

First, Pilate, the brutal Roman governor, has Galilean worshipers killed in the temple,  
their blood mingled with their sacrifices,  
an act of violence and religious desecration.

Then another:  
a tower in Siloam collapses.  
Eighteen people crushed in an instant.

And the crowd wants to know:  
*Were they worse sinners?*  
Did they deserve it?  
Were they being punished?

It's an old instinct:  
when something terrible happens, we try to make sense of it by assigning blame.  
Maybe it's their sin.  
Maybe it's karma.  
Maybe, thankfully, it's not us.

But Jesus refuses to be dragged into their conversation.  
"No," he says.  
Not because sin doesn't matter  
but because that's not how God sees.

The people are looking for answers.  
Jesus gives them a parable.

A man has a fig tree in his vineyard.  
For three years, he's been checking it. Still no fruit.  
He's frustrated. "Cut it down," he says.  
"Why should it take up good soil?"

I'll give away the game.  
The man has no relationship with the tree.  
He doesn't sit beneath its branches.  
He hasn't watered its roots.  
To him, it's simple: no fruit, no use.

But the gardener sees something else.

"Give it another year," he says.  
"I'll dig around it."

I'll fertilize it.  
I'll stay with it.  
Let's see what happens."

What strikes me is the gardener doesn't promise results.  
He doesn't guarantee fruit.

What he offers is presence.

He will be with the tree.  
Tend to it.  
Care for it.  
Not because it's proven itself useful,  
but because it's alive.  
Because it matters.

And what if the man joins the gardener in his work?  
What if the man prunes its branches...  
waters its roots...  
rests under its shade...

How will the man react in a year  
if the tree he has come to love still bears no fruit?

And I wonder...  
if that's the real invitation in this parable:

To stop evaluating life by what it produces,  
and start asking instead:  
*Who are we with?*  
*To whom are we tending?*

That's what Jesus is doing here.

The crowd wants to talk about tragedies from a safe distance.  
Jesus steps into the dirt, into the mess.  
Into the slow, frustrating work  
of staying with something that hasn't borne fruit,  
but still might.

This is how God sees the world.

Not through the lens of efficiency or judgment,  
but of relationship.

I do not believe in a God who is a distant evaluator,  
ticking boxes and cutting down what disappoints.

I worship God the gardener:  
God who digs around our roots.  
God who pours grace like water.  
God who feeds us with the Spirit's nourishment.  
God who stays with us,  
even when we seem fruitless.

And Jesus invites us to see the world through God's eyes.

The people want to talk about sin  
as a reason to disconnect,  
to explain away,  
to walk past the pain.

But Jesus says: *Stay with it.*

Stay with the ones who are hurting.  
Stay with the fig tree.  
Even if it doesn't look promising.  
Even if it's hard.

Of course, there's still urgency.  
The tree won't stand forever.  
Life is fragile.  
Towers fall.  
Violence persists.  
Time is precious.

But the response to urgency  
isn't to cut down.

It's to show up.  
To get your hands in the dirt.  
To be with.

Not every tree will bear fruit.  
Not every life will go the way we hope.

But fruitfulness is not the only measure.

Sometimes, presence is the miracle.

The gardener doesn't give up  
because he knows: love changes things.  
Relationship changes things.

And so I wonder...

I wonder how many fig trees we've given up on too soon.  
I wonder what might grow if we stayed a little longer.  
I wonder if we'll ever know just how much  
God has dug around our roots,  
tended our hearts,  
waited with us in the slow seasons.

I wonder what fruit is yet to come.

Amen.