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***“Lessons Learned from the Fig Tree”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

The First Sunday of Advent: HOPE

November 29, 2020

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**Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 64: 1-9    Mark 13: 24-37**

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence--as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

Yet, O LORD, you are our Creator; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in

the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

### Sermon

**Wait.**

**Watch.**

**Prepare.**

**Hope.**

Jesus said,

*“From the fig tree learn its lesson:*

*as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves,  
you know that summer is near.*

*So also, when you see these things taking place,*

*you know that God is near, at the very gates.*

*Truly I tell you,*

*this generation will not pass away  
until all these things have taken place.*

*Heaven and earth will pass away,*

*but my words will not pass away.”*

***“From the fig tree learn it’s lesson...”***

Trees, including fig trees, feature prominently across the Bible.

In the Book of Genesis,

the Creation story introduces us to the Garden of Eden.

In the Garden of Eden God places the first humans,

warning them not to eat from either the Tree of Life

or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Adam and Eve eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,

and when they realize they are naked

they cover themselves with fig leaves.

In the Hebrew Scriptures (aka the Old Testament)

the Prophet Joel preaches Good News to Israel (Joel 2: 21-27),

equating Israel with a fruitful fig tree.

*“Do not fear, O soil;*

*be glad and rejoice,*

*for the Lord has done great things!*

*Do not fear, you animals of the field,  
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;  
the tree bears its fruit,  
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.”*

Like a fruit-bearing fig tree, a faithful Israel has no need to fear.  
Do not be afraid!  
Bloom & blossom where you are planted!  
Be patient, be awake, produce good fruit!

The fig tree is a fit emblem of Israel.  
Its peculiarity is that the blossoms of the fruit appear before the leaves.  
Naturally, therefore, we should look for fruit on a tree in full leaf.

The fig tree is a New Testament symbol or figure of Israel  
and was used by Jesus Himself.

In Mark 13, Jesus speaks of the unveiling of God’s time and mighty purpose.

*“From the fig tree learn its lesson:  
as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves,  
you know that summer is near.  
So also, when you see these things taking place,  
you know that God is near, at the very gates.”*

“The lesson of the fig tree is a call to mindfulness  
– a call to pay attention to signs in our lives and in the world  
that indicate God’s drawing near to us.

Jesus shared the fig tree illustration with his followers  
when they asked him about his coming again on the Day of Judgment.  
It was an admonition to be vigilant and keep alert in preparation for Christ’s return “at  
an unexpected hour.” (Dexter French)

Watch.  
Wait.  
Be alert!  
Hope.  
Be not misled!  
Remember the Promise.  
Draw strength for today and tomorrow from the Promise.  
Keep watch.

From Genesis to Joel to Jesus to the Church today,  
Humanity speaks to the natural world,  
and – when we stop, wait, watch, become alert and listen –  
we find that nature is speaking right back to humanity.

All around us the environment is crying out for mercy, for attention, for respite,  
for clean air and water and soil.

The heavens are telling,  
the fig trees of the fields are clapping their hands,  
the oceans are roaring,  
the mountains shout out,  
the birds of the air and creatures on four legs and more  
lift their voices as one.

One of the lessons of the fig tree is  
if we don't practice better stewardship of Mother Earth  
one day there will be no more...fig trees, fig leaves, figs, Mother Earth.

Unlike Cinderella and every Disney movie,  
humans are not the center of the story.  
Our Deity and morality and immortality do not revolve around us.  
We don't own or control or hold dominion over this planet;  
we share it!

Our nation launched the Paris Accord to address climate change,  
then our nation backed out of the Paris Accord,  
and now our nation may go back in,  
joining the rest of the world to delay and deter climate change.  
We hope and pray it is not too late, but every second counts.

How many of us breathed good clean fresh air as if for the first time  
when Atlanta stopped,  
came to a complete standstill and stopped  
back in March and April and May?

We saw stars at night!  
For the first time I heard silence in my front yard  
– there was no dull roar of 285 traffic.  
Species long hidden came out and frolicked  
in the waves and in greener pastures the world over.

For 2 millennia Jesus Christ has been pointing out that nature is giving us signs:  
warning signs -- peace signs -- distress signs -- signs of hope.

Christ is daily asking us, preaching to us, praying for us  
to overcome our disconnectedness from God's green earth  
so we can hear and respond in God's timing  
to the lessons the fig tree is teaching.

**Wait**  
**Watch**  
**Prepare**  
**Hope**

Hey, remember who Mary thought Jesus was outside the Tomb?  
The Gardener.  
Gardeners are patient.  
Gardeners grow new life.  
Gardeners celebrate change.

Change takes time, practice, preparation.  
Get ready.  
Stay alert.

**Wait.**  
**Watch.**  
**Prepare.**  
**Hope.**

The Greek translation of Jesus' teaching to keep alert  
is **gregoreuo** -- pronunciation **gray-gor-yoo'-o**  
The word **gregoreuo** is where we get the man's name Gregory.  
Literally it means stay awake, practice watchfulness, be alert.  
We are to keep alert, be ever-aware.  
Christ is not telling us to claim an intellectual attitude,  
nor to think we have inside knowledge of facts concerning Christ's coming...  
**Gregoreuo** is a moral quality of spiritual readiness for the Lord's return.  
In other words, don't be a comatose  
Christian!" [http://my.execpc.com/~crnrstn/sermons/sermons\\_1998](http://my.execpc.com/~crnrstn/sermons/sermons_1998)

They say that a mother was seated on a bench in our church's Decatur Toy Park  
when a small boy about five years old sat down near her.  
He started winding what appeared to be a prized possession: a Mickey Mouse watch.  
"What a neat watch!" she said.  
"Does it tell you the time?"  
"Of course not!" said the boy.  
"You gotta look at it."

As Second Peter says, "Make your calling and election sure." --2 Peter 1:10

When it comes to your relationship with Jesus Christ  
in the here and now,  
in between the Resurrection and His Return,  
in between the Already and the Not Yet,  
what are you and I going to do, to be, to share?

Look where Jesus is pointing us to look...

He said,  
**"From the fig tree learn it's lesson..."**

**Wait.**  
**Watch.**  
**Prepare.**  
**Hope.**

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*