



## Jamaica Methodist District Holy Week 2020 Meditation Series

### MEDITATION FOR THE MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK 2020

#### Topic: FIG TREE CURSED (Text: MARK 11: 12–14, 20–24)

It is not very often that I find myself questioning the actions of Jesus. After all, I believe Him to be the Son of God and therefore He has the exclusive right to do as He pleases. However, I must confess that there are two incidents that supposedly took place during the last week of His earthly mission that certainly give me the creeps. One was when He went through the Temple with a whip - a very angry Jesus! Like a madman, he was! I can, of course, appreciate why He seemed so angry. He detected a definite abuse of what should have been a sacred place where justice, love and peace abound. Persons wanting to purchase doves for the sacrifice were being "ripped off" by the merchants. It was a "cut-throat," commercial atmosphere that was prevalent. Jesus reacted strongly to this, and justifiably so. "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you make it into a den of thieves."

The second incident that caused me to shudder was when Jesus cursed a fig tree. The cursing was not all; the result was that within a day or two the tree dried up. It just died. How do you explain that? No. I am not seeking an explanation for Jesus' ability to do that. Rather, I would be interested to understand exactly why Jesus felt He had to use His superior powers to destroy this tree. True, it can be argued that a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit. If it is not bearing fruit, then it is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended. Therefore, it deserved to die. But - there is a time and a season for everything, and when Jesus approached the fig tree, it was not during the season of figs. So, what did He expect? Did He act in haste when He cursed the fig tree? Was He later filled with remorse, feeling sorry for what He did? There is no indication from the Scriptures that He felt He had done wrong. It raises the interesting question as to whether everything that Jesus did was moral and correct. Or do we have here a case where the Son of God was guilty of an error?

This action certainly runs counter to the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" stereotype. But who said that Jesus had always to be the "nice and easy"



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guy? Have we “made Jesus in our own image and likeness” and therefore find ourselves revolting at the thought of him doing anything that seems to be out of character? What are our thoughts about him expelling the legion of demons that was inside a man and sending the lot into a herd of pigs that eventually headed downstream to their deaths? The pig breeders and those who made a living off these animals were angry, so much so that they wished for Jesus to leave their territory immediately. However, I can applaud this action on the part of Jesus because His concern was for the welfare of a human being, made in the image and likeness of God, who was being prevented by the demonic presence, from reflecting that spark of divinity. Perhaps the only way that this man could appreciate that he was truly rid of the demonic possession within himself was to have the demons visibly take control of the unsuspecting pigs and drown them.

I find this pig incident helpful in wrestling with the cursing of the fig tree. It seems obvious that Jesus operates on the principle that plants and animals must always take second place to human need. They exist basically to render service to humanity. This certainly is in keeping with Genesis chapter one where in verse 28, human beings are to be allowed to have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth, and in verse 29 where seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees are there to serve human needs. When this is taken into consideration, it is much easier for one to excuse Jesus for cursing the fig tree, not because it wasn't bearing fruit, but because He was demonstrating His lordship over nature. The Son of God, at one with the Creator, is at liberty to do with nature and the rest of creation as He pleases. This ought to be seen in the context of Jesus' overall ministry. When He fed the multitudes, He was giving a clear sign that God's Kingdom or sovereign rule was at hand and that divine authority could override natural laws. The same is true for the stilling of the storm. Nature and the rest of creation must submit, as “natural” rules, laws and principles are held in abeyance when God decides that they must.

The cursing of the fig tree must therefore be seen in the light of the prerogative of God in Christ to do as He pleases with the creation that is subject to Him. It also calls us to cultivate an attitude of trust in God. Trust God when we want to question why the fig tree was cursed and allowed to die. This has implications for how we learn to trust God in other



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situations that evoke seemingly unanswerable questions: Why did God allow that beautiful little baby boy, the pride and joy of mother and father, to die? Why was the young girl cruelly kidnapped and raped by her captors? Why was that man, in the prime of youth, allowed to be murdered? In life there will be these and even more difficult questions as we suspect divine complicity in or approval of seemingly merciless acts. Trusting God will mean that you and I are prepared to give to God the benefit of the doubt when we cannot make head or tail of a situation that involves human suffering.

This issue of human suffering and our trust in God comes to the fore even in the current coronavirus pandemic. Even though satisfactory answers cannot be found as to why God allows this virus to hold sway, one must in humility admit that we are mere mortals who "know in part". We do not have the total picture before us to give foolproof answers. However, it is because of that trust, that confidence we have in God, we are led to say with John Milton, English poet and intellectual of the seventeenth century: "Just are the ways of God and justifiable to men." We are encouraged to keep the dialogue going because it is in the process of enquiry that we are led to discern new aspects of truth and to come to a better understanding of God.

Having been led to reflect upon a fig tree that was cursed and died, I find myself thinking about another tree that we in the Caribbean region used to take for granted, and which is presently withering and dying. It is the mythical "money tree" that used to grow wild in Britain, Canada and the United States. Now with the reality of economies adversely affected by the current global crisis, we are being made to understand that these trees are no longer bearing much fruit and very soon will not be as beneficial to us as they used to be in the past. In the given context, the operative attitude must still be one of trust in God, confidence in God. Because we trust in the providential care of God, we ought to know that there are similar productive trees in our part of the world. Put another way, we in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean must learn to trust ourselves and to know that it is not everything we need must originate in Northern countries like Europe and North America. If we honestly search for the alternatives, which God has certainly bestowed upon our region, we will be amazed to discover that the resources have been with us all along, only we have never felt the need to be industrious.



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When Caribbean countries began gaining their political independence from Europe in the nineteen-sixties, there was a slowly emerging movement that affirmed local products. During festive seasons, the people of the region began to make use of tropical fruits - mangoes, pawpaws, bananas, sapodillas - considering them not as inferior to but on par with apples, pears and grapes that were grown in temperate climates. That affirmation of our own worth must be played out in other scenarios. No longer must we depend upon friends from overseas to finance our work of mission. We must do it ourselves by beginning firstly to trust God, that we have received the gifts that will enable us to forge ahead faithfully and yield positive results. The financial fruits that we require are there for the taking, because the members of our congregations are in possession of the seeds that soon will yield abundantly.

Let us, however, realize that quite apart from financial fruits, we all have been blessed with other gifts. There are gifts of leadership, gifts of organization, gifts of music, gifts of sports, gifts of creativity. Our people know how to find answers to problems that confront them. I guarantee that if we are serious about making our Caribbean Church move ahead by leaps and bounds and make an impact on the mission scene we will do it. Where there is a will, there is a way. What is being called for, in effect, is that you and I are to be faithful stewards of the time, talents and treasures that we have received from God.

We go back to the fig tree which was cursed and died presumably because it was not bearing fruit, not doing what it was supposed to do. It did have an excuse - it was not the season for figs. Mind you, this was a very good excuse. But excuses, in the present scheme of things, will be to no avail. You and I know that we must be intentional, determined, and resolute. Notice how Jesus responded to Peter when this disciple pointed out to Him that the fig tree He cursed had withered. He said that if one has faith in God, one can achieve just about anything. Faith can remove mountains. So, for Jesus, the issue was not whether He did something immoral when He put an end to the life of the fig tree. As mentioned already, He could do this because He is the Creator, the Master, and the Controller. We are in the



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business of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of exercising God's mission, and we must spare no effort.

No excuses, then! We dare not say in the situation caused by the coronavirus that because we cannot meet in our church buildings for worship, we cannot be effective as the Church. On the contrary, we are now being challenged, among other things, to bear witness as the church without walls. What is being asked of us is to put to the test our trust in God, our faith, our confidence. We must therefore reject the tendency to give excuses for not witnessing. We must ask ourselves some soul-searching questions. How do we think outside of the box? How do we as Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Moravians, United Church, indeed as Christians within the ecumenical movement, how may we, guided by the Holy Spirit, discern practical ways of using the gifts made available to us? How do we capitalize on the numerous insights with which the Body of Christ has been blessed? How can we together enhance the work of mission and evangelism within Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean region? It not being the season for figs did not evoke sympathy from Jesus Christ. It not being the opportune time for mission is not an excuse that will be acceptable by Him.

In sum, sisters and brother, on that fateful week as He wended His way to the Cross, an angry Jesus cursed the fig tree. The same angry Jesus remonstrated against those in the temple for doing what was contrary to the will of God. It could not be your wish and mine to be confronted by an angry Jesus. We know what to do to avoid this happening to us. Let us be alert, proactive, creative, and diligent in doing what God expects of us. We are a people of faith. This truth will be seen by our works, which reflect that ours is not a dead faith but a living one in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.