

Mark 11: 12-14

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it.

Meditation: This passage is a difficult one. It shows Jesus in an apparent moment of weakness. He is hungry. He looks for food in a place that cannot provide it. He is disappointed, upset, and even angry. He curses the fig tree, for what? Because it does not provide fruit out of season. Now the fact that such a passage is included in the gospel is remarkable in and of itself. But it has some lessons to offer us also. First of all, it reveals the humanity of Jesus. Too often, Christians have tended to forget this fact. Jesus was a human being subject to all the limitations, weaknesses, frustrations and pains that life involves. But second, this incident is probably included in the gospel to show that like the fig tree, stubborn, resistant Israel has not born fruit and therefore has come under Jesus' curse and God's judgement. In a way this is out of character for Jesus and God in terms of the image of God revealed by Jesus as loving, forgiving and compassionate. Yet Israel is like a child close to a parent's heart. God has given God's very heart to Israel only for it to be trampled underfoot repeatedly. God's response toward Israel wavers between a final judgement, then lament, and then a further reaching out in the persistent, loving hope that Israel will return to the way of salvation in communion with God.

It may be a child, a family member, a colleague or a friend... but this wrestling with upset and hurt, from anger, condemnation and judgement, to lament and concern as Jesus also expresses over Israel, and then a further reaching out (which is what the whole cross/resurrection event will be all about)... This leads to healing and deepening of relationship or a break in it. God as Jesus reveals God will never turn away, for God's love is 'steadfast love' (*hesed* in Hebrew). But we may turn away from God. This is the danger and the tragedy.

In this time of Covid-19, how are our different relationships weathering the strain of disorientation, stress, boredom, isolation, resentment, anger and fear?

Prayer: There is fear, O God. There is anger. There is sorrow and lament. There is hope and desire. There are many feelings swirling within us all at once, O God, layer upon layer. This time can compound it all, even as we can smile and be fine on the outside. We put pressure on others and others put pressure on us, and too often we cannot be what others want or expect us to be. Have mercy, O God. Flood us with your grace. Feed us with new hope for what can be. Give us courage to move on, let go and let be should that be the path for us... Amen.