

Cork Scripture Group



Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

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Seasons of Hope 2 Spring 2021

Barren and Budding: Growing Hope – The Fig Tree Parables

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As I begin to write the Liturgical Season has changed, it is Ordinary Time. Extraordinary Ordinary Time really. The celebrant's vestments at online Mass are green. The Gospel message too is fresh and green as it speaks to 2021, some 2 millennia since Jesus first answered Andrew with "Come and see." Spring however feels a long way off as we barely register the slowly lengthening days of our third lockdown and level 5 uncertainty and fear. A physical, psychological and spiritual weariness grips many of us a year after the first mentions of a novel corona virus emerged from distant Wuhan. There is a very real need for good news. This year, I must admit, I do not feel the rush to follow like Andrew, but rather identify with Nathaniel who had to be coaxed from under a fig tree by Philip. I cannot stay inside forever, I do not want to even, but it is safe for now. And yet, as the vaccine begins to be rolled out for the elderly and front-line workers, we look forward to this giving us not only peace of mind for the most vulnerable in our communities, but the hope that as more of us become vaccinated society will reopen and some social normality will return.

'Hope springs eternal' we say, or 'Where there's life there's hope'. 'Hope is the last thing ever lost', is an old Italian proverb. Aristotle said, 'Hope is a waking dream'. Hope is an abstract concept we have embraced since humans first started to define ourselves and contextualise our existence in the world we inhabit. Greek mythology tells the story of Pandora, the first woman on earth, who was given many gifts by the gods but was created to punish Prometheus for stealing fire from the gods. She was given a box that contained special gifts but told never to open it. Of course, her curiosity got the better of her and when she opened it illness, war and various other hardships hidden in the box were released. Pandora became scared and closed the box as fast as she could, trapping hope inside. This ancient myth helped people address why evil exists in the world and the importance of hope prevailing.

We need hope. It is an unquantifiable trust that what we dream and strive for will not only be possible but probable. Hope is not ambition but the desire for the fulfilment of our deepest needs. We project ourselves out of and through doubts and fears, hardship and all kinds of adversity, sustained by a hope in future possibilities. Paul tells the Corinthians with zealous certainty that three things will last, 'Faith, hope and love' (1Cor 13:13). His words echo down the centuries to us carrying the joy of Christian hope with them. When you read

this the green vestments will have changed to the purple of preparation, of repentance and new beginnings, at our online Masses. Let us look at hope together through the added dimension of our Christian faith.

Read each of the following gospel extracts which refer to parables about fig trees. You may not be as familiar with them as perhaps other growth parables such as the 'Sower and the seed' or the 'Mustard seed'. Read each a few times and take note of anything that strikes you that you may not have noticed before. Sit with the questions after each for a little while. I have included the lead up to the parable for situation and context; Jesus did not just pull his teaching out of the air but very much in response to the situation of the day.



The barren fig tree

Luke 13 (ESV)

Repent or Perish

13 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **2** And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? **3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. **4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. **7** And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down.

Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'

What is your first impression of Jesus in this gospel extract? Does it change with further reading?

Who do you identify with in this story? Why?

Is Jesus' response to the news of the murdered Galileans surprising ?

What challenges you in this story?

Do you learn anything about hope from this parable?



the Budding Fig Tree

Luke 21: 25-33 (ESV) [also Mk 13:28-31, Matt 24:32-35]

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to

take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁹ And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

What is this parable saying to you about the world?

What is it saying about Jesus’ teaching?

Does this parable make you nervous ?

Is there cause for hope in Jesus words?