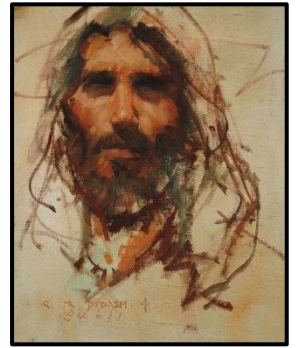


Producing the Kingdom's Fruit

Matthew 21:42-46 (NRSVue)



Darkness dims today's world. Neighbors despise others and treat them as undeserving. Snide remarks bounce off every bowed back. Anger persuades whole crowds to shame disliked people. Darkness reduces the world of human interaction to bitterness and strife.

Yet God dreams of a world where joy shines in every shared kindness.

Where's peace? Where's patience? Where's kindness? The fruit of God's kingdom ought to taste like cherries in springtime.

Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees who were listening to his parables: "...I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits" (Mt. 21:43).

God watches us and notes those who live in dark ways and those who labor for the triumph of light and goodness.

Jesus' Warning

Jesus warned the chief priests and Pharisees: *You're losing God's kingdom.* Under God's rule, hungry people taste the bread of kindness. Sick folk sniff the healing of their wounds. The naked wrap themselves, not in royal robes, but in warm sweatsuits. Kindness flourishes, and gratitude flows in happy words. God's reign over human life comforts and brings peace, belonging, and wonder.

But the Pharisees and chief priests forfeited abundant life in God's reign. He wanted to give them fullness of life, but their deeds spelled danger. Their iron grip on ritual choked the freedom to love as God loves. Regulation replaced compassion, and people gagged without the refreshing water of grace. The Pharisees' disdain stood like

a wall between mercy and those who need it. They tangled God's goodness in endless commands—Do this! Don't do that!—until divine love leaked like olive oil from cracked pottery. Their world shriveled.

Love by deeds, or grace leeches away.

The watching Lord wasn't pleased. He saw light dimmed in the ones called as stewards of it. Jesus warned them: *What they refuse to nurture shall wilt and be given to those who know how to nourish it.*

They were losing God's kingdom, his rule over life. But Paul shows its rebirth among outcasts.

Paul's Way

The apostle's Way preached God's kingdom—the rescue of sinful souls through Christ. Jesus bore the weight of our penalty and opened the path to peace, hope, and joy. To the Ephesians, the apostle taught radical care. Love your neighbor as if tending your own wounds. What comforts you in sorrow? Give it to those you know who grieve.

Christ has commissioned you. Teach his gentleness in a brutal world. Your words, “God loves you,” are therapy for survivors traumatized by rejection. Pour from your heart's goodness a living water—cool, overflowing. Let it satisfy a parched soul who begs from you a cup of grace.

Some in Ephesus responded. They welcomed the strange generosity of grace. But others scoffed. “Too liberal,” they sneered. Then they locked the synagogue's doors.

Paul left, but he didn't forsake the hungry. He fed them in the Hall of Tyrannus. He taught them the Christian Way—to be peacemakers, pure in heart, poor in spirit.

Do you love this life of Christ? It's not just a belief. It's belonging. A way of happiness that ripples into others. A fellowship that heals. A diverse family marked by grace.

Christian Witness

The Christian witness rang with loud tones. Paul wrote, “...*the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true*” (Eph. 5:9). He said this pleased God. He encouraged Christians to seek what’s good, right, and true in the Lord’s eyes.

You know what such things are. People do shameful deeds in the dark. Drink and carouse. Argue and fight. Poke with blades and pull triggers. Kill and flee.

You’re a disciple of Jesus, a child of light and kindness. You avoid the black fruit of darkness. Where you work, you encourage without gossiping. Within your family, you listen before speaking and are quick to forgive. Where you live, you volunteer to feed the hungry or visit in a nursing home. You know what pleases God, and you produce the fruit of his kingdom.

The children of light, Christians who act as faith dictates, brighten the world. They drop seeds of joy and nurture the plants of fruitful life. They prop happiness against gloom and produce a joy people didn’t know they could have. Christians bring kindness, hope, and humility to a people starved for compassion. The fruit of the kingdom shines above the dimmed world and smiles grow on faces in decay. Everything good and right and true is pleasing God and restores his world.

Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees who were listening to his parables: “...I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits” (Mt. 21:43).

Do you heed the Lord’s warning? Do you make the world brighter by lighting candles for people Jesus calls you to love?

Amen

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