

THE THIRD WEEK IN LENT

everything [in] between rest & growth



## Slow Growth

There's a vine in the South that covers everything.  
It chokes out the light. Grows up to twelve inches per day.  
In a matter of years, it will blanket a forest.  
If you saw it from space, you'd marvel at its reach.  
If you saw it from the passenger seat, you'd weep at  
what it covers.

Those looking for fast shade plant this invasive vine.

*Who can blame them? We're all impatient.*

But if it's fruit you want—

the tart cherry,

the sticky sweet kumquat,

the soft side of a peach,

the crisp bite of an apple—

then bless the rain.

Thank the sun.

Put your hands in the dirt,

and wait.

*Poem by*

*Rev. Sarah Speed*

THE THIRD WEEK IN LENT  
everything [in] between rest & growth

**Read** Luke 13:6-9  
**Commentary** | Rev. Jeff Chu

*Slow down. Do your part. Remember the promise.*

Two years ago, I planted asparagus crowns. The farmer who sold them to me said, “You know you’ll have to wait a couple of years to harvest, right?”

Of course I did. I had Googled: “how to grow asparagus.”

Still, the next spring, when a slender spear rose from the midst of the previous autumn’s fallen leaves, I could barely restrain myself from harvesting it. I immediately imagined charring asparagus, and squeezing some lemon and grating some parmesan over the top. Ooh—and how about a slightly runny fried egg?

Then I remembered the farmer’s counsel: “You know you’ll have to wait a couple of years to harvest, right?”

After briefly congratulating myself for my self-control, I tucked my dream back into the vault of future possibility. It wasn’t yet time for our homegrown asparagus. It needed that year, then another, to concentrate on its largely invisible labor: finding purchase in the soil, extending its roots, gathering strength to flourish.

Like my asparagus, the fig tree can’t be rushed. Jesus’ original, agriculturally sophisticated audience would have known that a fig seedling needs several years to bear fruit. They might even have found the vineyard owner’s question laughable. They would have understood that absence of fruit on a young tree wasn’t a sign of failure. Maturity requires time and care, attention and patience.

It has always struck me as odd that a common reading of this parable imagines the vineyard owner to be God. (Such is our temptation toward hierarchical thinking that the most seemingly powerful figure in a parable must always be God.) That interpretation runs up against our belief that God is “slow to anger and abounding with steadfast love.”<sup>9</sup> And surely a call to faithful waiting seems more apt and necessary for God’s ever-impatient people. As God reminds Habakkuk, “There is still a vision for the appointed time. . . . If it seems to tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.”<sup>10</sup>

Faithful waiting doesn’t mean doing nothing: The gardener waters, weeds, and fertilizes. And modern science is teaching us what happens in the meantime. Contrary to the peevish vineyard owner’s assertion, nothing is wasted. Down below, the fig tree isn’t just gathering strength; it’s also building relationships. Soil-borne fungi are finding home in its roots, boosting the tree’s capacity to resist disease and take in nutrients. In return, the tree feeds the fungi.

Perhaps this parable is better read as a gentle rebuke against those of us who are all too comfortable with our on-demand, instant-gratification culture—and who believe the lie that we can control more than we actually do. Perhaps, too, this parable was a word that Jesus needed to preach to his very human self. After all, he’s the one who, in Matthew and Mark, curses a fig tree for failing to give him fruit when he wants it.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps this is our invitation: Slow down. Do your part. Remember the promise. Whether asparagus or fig, the harvest will come.

## Reflect

In your own life, what do you need more of: rest or growth, or a little of both?

---

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 34:6

<sup>10</sup> Habakkuk 2:3

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 21:19; Mark 11:13-14



**Fig Leafing | Hannah Garrity**  
*Paper lace with watercolor*

THE THIRD WEEK IN LENT  
everything [in] between rest & growth

**Read** Luke 13:6-9

**Artist statement** | Hannah Garrity

At our church retreat a few months ago, we offered a session on eco-spirituality. Our instructor led an exercise that focused our attention on a single, natural object. I selected a wilted flower. We were to draw it, then tell its narrative. We were to refer to it as a "one." This one. We were to affirm the one and be affirmed by the one.

That exercise resonates with me here as I revisit the parable of the fig tree. In this circular image, two figures lean in over the tree; their heads are full of ideas for fruiting, their bodies are full of dead fig leaf patterns.<sup>12</sup> Their ideas and dreams have not born fruit. They converse about how to cultivate growth. Then one pushes back against the other and creates tension, discord. From that tension comes an opening, letting the fig tree have its time and space to thrive.

In this paper lace piece, the fig tree is full of life, representing its potential when given the time and space to grow. As I wonder about God's presence here in the parable, I see that the God figure could be the fig tree. "Let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it,"<sup>13</sup> the vineyard keeper replies. As I breathe into the gift of another day, where do I see potential in need of my honor, my care, and the space and time to grow?

Or perhaps the God figure here is in the space between them all, between the three. The fig tree, this one, begins its leafing in the in-between.

---

<sup>12</sup> The two circular shapes with fruit seeds inside of them represent the figures' heads; the branch-like imagery beneath the heads represent their shoulders.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 13:8, NRSV