

## **Live a Fruitful Life**

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**Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word.**

**Please be seated.**

**Good morning to you all in the pews and those watching at home.**

**In today's Gospel, John the Baptist calls people to repentance, to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. It is a call to transformation, action, and bearing fruit in our lives. John's language is severe, revealing the urgency of his message. Repentance isn't merely about feeling sorry for our sins; it's about turning away from them and changing our hearts and actions. The people of John's time believed that being descendants of Abraham guaranteed their righteousness. He has a warning for those who place faith in the false hope of their heritage alone saving them from the judgement of God. Ritual is not the road to salvation; only true transformation is. Act your faith, merely proclaiming it is nothing.**

**What stronger imagery is there to warn of the judgments to come than the axe lying at the root of a tree, at the ready if the tree does not bear fruit? It compels the crowd to ask how they can avoid the axe. In what I always thought was companion reading to the Beatitudes, John provides specific examples of making straight the way to the Lord: generosity, honesty, integrity. Living one's life in these ways is the only way to prepare oneself for the One who is to come.**

Today's Gospel is an urging to us all to prepare for the coming of the Lord and his judgement. To prepare by living a life worthy of the promise of redemption. To live our faith through our actions. To live life differently to make a difference in the world.

The act of preparation is a way of attuning yourself to the Divine. Preparation is also an act of faith and obedience. One story that comes to mind is Noah preparing the ark, amid ridicule, because he had unquestioning faith in God's plan.

This preparation is a lifelong process to grow closer to God through repentance, prayer, study, and acts of compassion and understanding. To be truly repentant requires humility, self-examination, and a willingness to turn to God with a contrite heart. As John the Baptist commanded, to live a life of generosity, honesty, and integrity.

For all the uncertainty and challenges in this life, the right kind of preparation will allow us to live with grace, to respond in a meaningful way to the world's needs with all the attributes John the Baptist calls out. The price of not living this kind of life is to be cut down as a tree unable to bear fruit, to be regarded as chaff thrown into the fire.

This reading, like so many others in the Bible, uses agrarian imagery to convey how God takes the measure of us, and how He will deal with those who fall short. Also, how to prepare to be fruitful.

The Bible is rich with agrarian imagery because of the cultural, historical, and spiritual context of its time.

The people of ancient Israel and the surrounding regions lived in an agrarian society. Farming, shepherding, and vineyard cultivation were central to daily life. Using imagery familiar to the audience made the Bible's teachings relatable and practical.

Agriculture directly demonstrated dependence on God. Rain, harvests, and the fertility of the land were seen as blessings from God. Imagery like sowing, reaping, and seasons reflected this reliance on divine provision and care.

Agrarian metaphors effectively convey spiritual truths about preparation, growth, patience, and productivity. The mustard seed represents beginnings and faith. The harvest symbolizes judgment or the culmination of work. Vineyards and fruit signify spiritual fruitfulness and obedience.

Farming and nature are universal human experiences, transcending cultures, and eras. The principles of planting, nurturing, and harvesting apply broadly, making this imagery timeless and understood by all.

If you ever go to our local orchards, Averill or Starberry, you will see trees that bear fruit and stumps where trees once stood. Preparing the soil is integral to a successful harvest. So is pruning, thinning, cutting down, and patience. These are all necessary for an orchard to bear ample fruit.

The city mouse that I was, the first time I visited an apple orchard I was surprised to see that the most productive trees are gnarly, cut back to allow their energy to go into producing fruit. Thinning of clusters of fruit prevents overcrowding and improves fruit size and quality. In other words, to prune and thin out what is not essential. Fruit trees also have varying times of maturation when they either begin to bear fruit or need to be cut down to make way for other trees to make use of the soil. The farmer sets his clock to this timetable and harvests or cuts down accordingly.

We, too, must focus on only what is necessary to live a life that is fruitful. To prune that which is not essential - those things that sap our energy and divert our true purpose. And, while the axe may be at the ready, God will give each of us our entire lives to reach maturity and bear fruit.

So, how do we lead a fruitful life, pleasing to God?

We should give thanks and be respectful of the life given to us, to make the most of our abilities to learn, to take care of ourselves and others. To be generous with our time and resources. To be more about giving than receiving. To show kindness and empathy.

I am reminded of Galatians 5:22-23 listing the "fruits of the Spirit" which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

To make a positive impact on your family, community, and the world.

To strive to align your actions with your beliefs and values.

To stay connected to God through prayer, Scripture, and worship. These are your spiritual sources for strength, guidance, and renewal.

To recognize that growth comes through trials and perseverance, to embrace setbacks as opportunities to gain experience and strengthen your character. Experience through setbacks may make you gnarly, but that is an opportunity to put your energy into something positive. I am reminded of the Japanese art of mending broken objects, called Kintsugi, which translates to "golden joinery." This practice involves repairing broken pottery by filling the cracks with a mixture of lacquer and powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Rather than hiding the damage, Kintsugi highlights the flaws, turning them into part of the object's history and beauty.

**Living a fruitful life isn't about achieving perfection but about progress, connection, and contribution. By growing in love, serving others, and staying aligned with your faith, you can live a life that bears abundant and lasting fruit. We need to ask ourselves:**

**Have we truly repented of our sins, turning away from them and toward God?**

**Are we producing fruit in our lives that reflects justice, mercy, and love?**

**If we strive to answer yes to these questions, we can keep the axe at bay, and become laden with fruit, for God's eternal enjoyment, and ours.**

**Amen.**