**A Tree and Its Fruit**

**August 2, 2020**

*Luke 6:43-45 – “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”*

*James 3:9-12 – “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”*

Wait, I thought we were digging into the Sermon on the Mount this summer? You know… the one found in the book of Matthew?

Well, we are. But at some point while looking into that passage this summer, I wanted to look at Luke 6, which many refer to as Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain, or Sermon on the Plateau. Even though this passage is shorter than the sermon we find in Matthew (Luke 6:20-49 vs. Matthew 5-7), much of the content is similar. They both start with the beatitudes and end with the parable of the builders. We also find portions of the Sermon on the Mount in other parts of Luke, which suggests that what we find in the Sermon on the Mount could have been given on various occasions in Jesus’ preaching – in other words, this was His “go-to message” for when Jesus encountered crowds.

 So, these verses we find in Luke 6 above can also be found in Matthew 7:15-20. They aren’t exactly the same, but the message regarding a tree and its fruit is very similar.

In Matthew, these words reference false prophets. In Luke, the message seems to refer more towards the general goodness of people’s hearts. A few weeks ago, we shared a devotion on the power that words have in interacting with others, and touched on the passage in James 3, which is seen above. In a time of heightened fear, anger, and uncertainty, it only seems fitting to continue talking about the power of words, and how our words are a reflection of our heart status.

We have explored the dangers of social media many times. It wouldn’t surprise me if you rolled your eyes soon after reading that sentence. But as we further navigate this pandemic, it feels like we need to keep aware of how much social media can influence our day-to-day lives. Personally, I’ve seen a lot of hatred and anger being spread around online. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter can provide a space for people to voice opinions without many repercussions, and because of that, people tend to reveal what is stored up in their hearts, for better or for worse.

These social media platforms can show us what fruit is being produced by these people. If you see someone constantly “bearing bad fruit” on Twitter, it’s likely that it’s a reflection of their heart. As Jesus says in Luke, thornbushes don’t produce figs, and briers don’t produce grapes.

Jesus is in the business of heart transformation. If we want to produce words and actions that are encouraging, loving, caring, and compassionate, we must work on our own hearts first. We have to deepen our understanding and empathy rather than speaking any word of hatred or condemnation. Before arguing with someone based on what we believe is right, we should approach in conversation that is based on love and compassion.

A good tree always produces good fruit, and a bad tree always produces bad fruit. I’ve asked this question before, and I will ask it again: what kind of fruit are you producing?

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. What other similarities do you see between the passages found in Luke 6 and Matthew 5-7? What differences do you see in those passages?
2. When “bad people” do or say good things, or when “good people” do or say bad things, how can we fit this in to what Jesus says in Luke 6:43-45? What does this say on a deeper level of the state of the human heart in general?
3. Part of Jesus’ overall message seeks to reveal that only God is good, and all people are in need of the love of Jesus. As humans, we never reach a point where we are good, blameless, or righteous. So, what could Jesus be referring to when He talks about the heart? Where does an individual’s attitude play into this conversation?
4. Who do you know in your own life that you would say bears good fruit? What attitudes do they have? What actions do you notice most out of them? What would you ask them to teach you, if you could think of one question you had of them?
5. What actions could you take to allow Jesus to transform your heart? Notice – you are not the one that transforms your heart. But you must allow Jesus in so He can work that process!
6. Think about your interactions with others as you go into this week. What comes out of those interactions? Are they producing a growing relationship, or arguments and disunity? Are your interactions producing healthy, thoughtful, caring conversation, or are they producing sour feelings towards each other? Consider the fruit that you see from your interactions with others, and what you can do to allow Jesus to continue to transform your heart.