**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**March 20th, 2022**

**Planted on Solid Ground**

**Lent III**

1. **Adaptable**

The text this week makes me think about adaptability. For instance, the other week, Cynthia shared with us one her joys that one of the flowers that was in her garage all winter ended up blooming and on that sunny Sunday, she was ready to put it out in the ground to continue to grow. Another congregant shared with me at one time about her Irises, when she wanted to get rid of them and she threw them into the compost bin and in May, they started to sprout from compost. The other week, when contractors were at my house in Sykesville, they found a bag of Irises I had pulled up to move and they threw them out – and if you know me, that’s a cardinal no-no – thinking they would be helpful and took them to the dump. I’ll tell you, in May, the dump will have some new flowers growing.

 Some plants are simply adaptable. Rain or shine, heat or cold, you can’t get them down and in some beautiful and stubborn way, they rise out of the ground, continuing to bloom year after year.

But you know those other plans. Someone once gave me an orchid, which was gorgeous, but as it turns out, it requires more love and attention than a small child and sadly, it did not see many days. Or that beautiful smelling lavender, which is gorgeous and so desired, but requires gravel like soil and it needs quick drying ground and direct sun. These plants are high maintenance, not adaptable, but loved.

But to have that wonderful and varied garden, you need the adaptable and non-adaptable, you need them all because mother nature needs it all. You can see it in all forms of nature, if that’s at work, you need both the folks who cast a big vision and you need those who are able to work out the details. At school, you need the athletes on the field and you need the clever chess players saying checkmate. The world goes round by having diversity of thought, character, and skills. The same is true for our passage today.

1. The Fig Tree

The fig tree is a fairly adaptable plant, but it does take more work than the grapes on the grapevine. Maybe the man was right – why put a fig tree there when we can get more money on the ground for grapes that will grow easily. Just tear it up. But the gardener gets it, even though this plant will seemingly not adapt, he needs to give it a bit more love, a bit more care, and another try at another season. Let’s not give up on the odd plant out.

I think that’s the same for the Kingdom of God. Sometimes we are the fig tree – I’ll admit it – I’m a little quirky. I like to think that the quirky is endearing, but it isn’t always to everyone, so I’m grateful when someone gives me one more shot, a little more understanding, a little more love and care. If we are truly being honest here, I imagine that all of you have felt a little like a fig tree in one situation or the other. If you’ve looked around the room and thought, “One of these things is not like the other…and that thing is me” – you get it. You know what it feels like to be left out, it hurts, it’s often painful and it makes you question your own worth and how you even found yourself in a crowd of adaptable grapes.

God is the gardener, God is the tender caretaker of all things, so we know that in that lonely feeling, we are held by a God who believes in us and knows us better than we know ourselves. Because we are followers of God, seeking to emulate his love, we know that we are also called to be caregivers, to be that person in the crowd to say, “hey, there’s a seat next to me if you’d like it” or “hey, it’s nice to have you here today” or “hey, my name’s Becca, what’s yours?” Those little words are words that begin the step of belonging, and we all want to belong. In this world, we might not belong, but in God’s Kingdom, we definitely do belong. We’re all in this together, blossoming and growing and learning on the solid ground of the Word.

1. Competition

You might wonder – how did Jesus even get to this parable in the

first place. Well, right before the parable or this story, you see people trying to tell on other people, to better themselves alone, and this quickly turns into a nose dive where Jesus has some real tough but real honest words to share with them.

 Like a parent, he seems to be asking these who came to him why they are telling on one another? Ultimately, God knows – so why are you running to me, trying to prove yourself right and throw a stone and point fingers? Trying to one-up one another isn’t an act of the Kingdom just like paying attention to only some plants is just bad gardening.

 The hard truth, but the real truth, is that we are all sinners. I know that’s not great news at first and it can make us all feel a little defensive so it makes us act out. What if I were to look at a convict and say, “well, at least I didn’t do that” or to turn around to a neighbor and say, “listen, you’ve done much worse to this neighborhood than me.” Does that sound like something Christ would say? No. Does that sound like something you may have heard a Christian say? Unfortunately, yes.

 Oh, we are guilty of it, we feel better if we point fingers but y’all, that is not the way of Christ. We can hold one another accountable, but we do that in words of love, grace, and fairness. We can indeed disagree, have different opinions, engage in civil discourse, but once that evolves in name calling and rudeness, we’ve crossed the line. Once we try to climb to the top of the podium, we can expect ourselves to get knocked off at our feet and fall into some humble pie.

 We are sinners. It doesn’t do us much good to try and weigh out whose sin is worse than another’s. That’s not our business, nor does it help in the way of belonging. Yet when we come together in an act of worship, when we admit our sin during our time of confession, we are naming our sin together and individually.

 Here’s the good news though, if not the great news, that as soon as we repent, as soon as we turn to God and admit our sin, God is quick to forgive. We hear those words in our assurance of pardon. We hear that we are worth it, we hear that we are called to try again, and we know ourselves as loved and beloved by God.

 Jesus says the same here – if you don’t want to repent, you perish and moreso, you just don’t live a truthful and abundant life. Yet again, in that instant, if you do repent, you are forgiven, you are set free. We all stand on the same ground, we are all sinners, but sinners who are forgiven ready to start again.

 So as you go out into this week, listen to the great Gardener and follow his ways. When you see someone who feels like a fig tree, make sure to invite them in and offer them a kind word of belonging. When you feel like the fig tree yourself, I invite you to take a scary step and challenge it, name why you feel left out or lonely. And above all, though, I pray that you, especially in this season of Lent, see the work of Christ as sure signs of how we are to act and operate in this world, as sinners set free to build up the Kingdom of God. Amen.