

“God’s Got His Shovel”

Luke 13:1-9

3/710

We need to let God dig into our lives and fertilize our lives with the richness of Christ.

Digging.

Jesus said the gardener wanted to dig around the fig tree.

Believe it or not, I have done a lot of digging over the years. I used to help my dad in his yard. I worked for five summers through college on the grounds crew for a large hospital. And of course now with the homes we have lived in there is always yard work to be done. When we moved into our current home, there was some major digging to be done, especially with some old overgrown bushes in the back yard. Denver Harter let me use some of his great digging tools.

And if you have done any digging, you know that it can be pretty hard work. Get into the summer when the ground is like rock, add to it some gnarly old roots, and you can have yourself a nice little workout.

But if you want good results in your gardening, you have to get out the shovel and dig—loosen the soil so the good stuff can get in there.

But, well, sometimes we simply don’t want to do the work.

A man who robbed a bank 10 years ago and was sentenced to 70 months in a federal penitentiary decided he liked prison life so much that he committed another crime, just so he could return! Danny Villegas walked inside a Federal Credit Union in Florida and told the teller he was robbing her, adding, "You might as well call the police right now."

Villegas then sat down on a couch in the lobby and waited for police to arrive. He said he wanted to rob a federal bank because he wanted to go back to a federal penitentiary. Villegas had worked in construction in Texas for five years, but had grown tired of the work.

Apparently, he robbed a bank in Fresno, California, 10 years ago, was sentenced to 70 months in a federal penitentiary in Phoenix, and enjoyed his time there."

Hugh Poland, Kingwood, Texas; source: Associated Press, "Police Say Man Staged Florida Robbery to Go Back to Prison," Houston Chronicle (1-9-07)

Ridiculous. Absolutely. True for many of us? Absolutely.

There are many of us, and I would venture to say all of us, where some place in our lives we really don’t want to change when we really need to. Or there are hurts there we don’t want to dig up. We can grow so accustomed to our flaws and our sin that it is too uncomfortable to make a change. Remember the word from a few weeks ago? It’s “inconvenient.”

And then God shows up and starts digging around. Did you ever have that with someone? You feel like you’re maintaining okay, even though something deep down is bothering you, when someone close to you shows up and starts digging around? “What’s going on?...How are you feeling?...Is something bothering you?” And then it all comes out.

Digging.

Jesus said the gardener wanted to dig around the fig tree.

God's got a shovel in His hand, and He's ready to dig into your life. In fact, He is digging, but perhaps you haven't named it as such because it feels more like work and annoyance than something good.

Where is God digging in your life right now?

Maybe we're sitting here this morning thinking these words from Jesus are for someone else. "The person next to me, or over there, better be listening in to this."

But we all need to. That is why the first section from Luke 13 is so important to for us to hear. There are a couple tough questions Jesus asks: Whether or not those disgraced by Pilate or killed by the tower were worse sinners than anyone else.

Because that was the thinking in that day. You must have sinned pretty badly to deserve such a fate. But Jesus says, "No, that's not it." They were no worse off than you or me. We are all in the same boat.

Do you hear it? Jesus said they are no *worse* sinners, which is to say we are all sinners. I know, it's not what we always like to hear. Come to church and get told you're a sinner! But I am one. We all are.

And Jesus' warning is also where we find hope:

There is still time—right now today—to allow God to make a change.

So it's back to the shovel. God is digging around in all of our lives, loosening the soil, preparing us for His goodness that we might bear fruit.

Where is God digging in your life right now? You know, it's that small voice, or little knot in your stomach, or voice of someone else, or just this feeling that something isn't exactly right. Whatever, you know what I mean, because it's saying:

"It's time to stop that hurtful action." Digging.

"It's time to truly admit you're afraid." Digging.

"It's time to own up to your mistake." Digging.

"It's time to talk to someone about your problem." Digging.

"Who are you pleasing? Why aren't you at peace? Why the guilt?" Digging, digging, digging.

Modern society would have us all be the victims and have our excuses for who we are and what we do—to keep the shovel from digging in. You know what I mean. We can find just about any and every reason for why we don't do what we ought to do, or why we don't change our attitude. "I was born that way...Someone hurt me...I'm not as bad as others...The system keeps me down." Whatever.

And those may all be real experiences that certainly cause hurt. Sometimes the ground of our heart can get pretty dry and hard as a rock. There are a lot of old, gnarly roots embedded in there. And so God digging around doesn't feel too pleasant. But we must allow His shovel to work, to loosen, to uproot, to expose the buried stuff that needs healed, fertilized by His loving presence.

Because:

Where God breaks the ground of our hearts, the fruit of His Spirit grows.

Life magazine once did an issue entitled "Who Is God?" which asked that question of people from all over the world. One interview was with David "B," [who] began to steal when he was 13 and [was then] in the fourth year of a 21-year sentence for murdering a man during an armed holdup." This is what He said:

“I didn't set out to kill him, but I did so, and in cold blood, when it seemed necessary. I didn't give it another thought at the time. I thought that I would shrug it off the way I had successfully ignored all my other crimes.

“But I soon discovered that a man who commits murder sets himself apart from all other human beings for the rest of his life. One day I woke and felt that I had been permanently stained by my act. The feeling grew so strong that I was almost relieved to be caught. The feeling of horror, of disgust, of shame grew. I consulted a priest in prison. He gave me a Bible and, as I began to read, I was somewhat comforted, not initially by a sense of God's forgiveness but by the conviction that He was present. The sense of separation I felt suggested the existence of a Being who was offended, who cared.

“What most impresses me now is the mercy of God, his refusal to be shocked by anything I could do. The God I know is a knowing but forgiving God. He can forgive all the more because he is nobody's fool. I still feel guilty, but I can feel calm and serene about my guilt. I can face it because I know that I am not alone in the universe.

“I am convinced the Bible has a lot more than guilt to teach me. But it is hard. I feel newborn before this religion and defenseless before the intensity of my feelings. I have always been violent. I am hoping that God may help me to have a little self-control. God, let me learn to be reasonable.”

"Who Is God?" Life (December 1990), p. 52

There comes a time in our lives, a critical, pivotal time, when God leads and we are not sure that we want to follow. As we live in Him He will continue to speak to us and show us areas of our lives which call for change, surrender, places where we must grow and trust Him more. Maybe you are there now. If not, God will lead you there.

God's concern for us is that we grow as His children in Christ.

I know, here's the difficult part: God's main purpose in our lives is not to merely make us comfortable. He wants to dig around so we grow and bear fruit.

“Allow me to dig around it and put manure on it”, the Gardener says. Some of you are farmers and know what this is about, but for us non-farmers, you've seen farmers spreading manure out in the fields. What happens to it? Manure doesn't just sit on top of the ground. It breaks apart and mixes in with the ground, becoming a part of the ground, so that the ground is enriched and transformed into a fertile field. Hence the name, fertilizer. Without the fertilizer what happens? The ground may produce fruit, but not as well. And if neglected, eventually the ground will be used up and turn fallow—empty, barren, useless.

So then instead of the shovel, the tool needed is the saw.

God is giving you every opportunity to bear fruit. He's digging and fertilizing. It doesn't always seem pleasant. But it is the way His loving, healing presence will penetrate that tough ground of your heart, transforming it into fertile soil for the fruit of His Spirit to grow and blossom and feed others around you.

Our call to worship this morning came from Psalm 63:1-4, words from David. “*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you.*” In 1 Samuel, we read of David's hiding out in the wilderness as King Saul tries to seek him out and kill him. These words from David's Psalm speak of his need for God's guidance and protection.

David's words can easily be set into our lives, so that his cry becomes ours. In this world, we can have it all and have nothing. We can be rich, yet desperately poor. We can have all knowledge, yet be hopelessly ignorant of what life is all about. Without

the richness of Jesus Christ's love and grace, we will find ourselves, like David, out in the desert, running from the powers that be which seek to take our lives.

The solution?

We must seek God.

Do you daily seek out the richness of God's blessings through Jesus Christ?

Seeking means action.

To seek means that your eyes are open, ready to see what God is doing in your life.

Do you see the blessings with which God has surrounded you? Do you see the opportunities God has placed before you to serve Him by serving others? Do you see the changes God wants to make and is making in your life? There is so much going on around us and within us, but so often we simply don't see it.

To seek also means that your ears are open, ready to hear God's Word spoken to you.

Do you hear what God is calling you to do with your life? Are you listening to the voice of Scripture, and to the voices of others God is using to call you closer to Himself?

To seek God means that your minds are open, ready to know God's will for your life.

Are you trying to keep an open mind to all the possibilities God has in store for you? Do you allow God to fill your mind with His thoughts, His agenda, and His wisdom to live your life?

To seek God means that your spirit is open, ready to encounter the Holy Spirit.

The truth is that we do not know what a day may bring—when our end may be. The tower may fall. And so today we must make the most of our time.

God's got His shovel, and He's digging in.

Prayer...O God, we give You all the praise, all the glory, all the honor You deserve. Thank You for loving us so much. Thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ who came to die that we may live. We seek Your presence in our lives. Open our eyes, that we may see Your wondrous work. Open our ears, that we may hear Your voice. Open our minds that we may not ever limit what You may want to do in our lives. Open our spirits to Your Holy Spirit, who brings life and joy like nothing else.

Move in our midst. Transform us today. Push us to take time out of our schedules to be with You. In fact, Lord, mold us that we would schedule our lives around You, and not the other way around. Forgive us when we take this life for granted. Fertilize our lives with the richness of Your grace and love. Thank You God for always hearing us, and for being so steadfast, when everything else around us falls away. We ask Your blessing upon us this day in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.