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Productive Living
Luke 13:1-9

The Rev. Dr. Gareth Icenogle
West Side Presbyterian Church

Gracious God now, feed us the word that you speak through Jesus, that we might be whole and healthy human beings, that we might be redeemed to do the work of Jesus Christ and the world, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Thank you young people and children for singing today. We deeply appreciate it.

You may remember the story of Alice in Wonderland and how that begins. Alice is resting with her sister on the bank of a creek or a river and evidently she falls asleep and suddenly she sees a white rabbit running by, with pink eyes, and the white rabbit is saying “I’m late; I’m late and as Walt Disney said, for a very important date. No time to say hello, good-bye, I’m late.” And takes out his watch and looks at it and actually runs off into a rabbit hole and goes into the rabbit hole and Alice, being curious, follows the rabbit into the rabbit hole and falls deeply down into a dark place.

One of the realities of our culture today is that reality of how many times a week do we say I’m late? I’ve not made it to the appointment on time. I am leading a very productive and busy life but I’m not making it on the schedule that I’ve set for myself. I’m late. We want to lead productive lives and we want our children to have productive lives and we tend to be driven by our watches to make the productivity happen.

When I was growing up, we had a few fruit trees out in our backyard and one of

those trees was a wonderful plum tree and on occasion there were a few plums on that tree and if they were in good shape and the birds hadn't got to them, they were absolutely delicious. Well one year my father decided to run a drainage hose from our back porch sink to the roots of that tree. And all sorts of things came through our back porch sink and were drained into the water that literally watered that tree. It was a lot of stuff and water that were going into the roots of that tree and low and behold that year, we had the most wonderful plum that were juicy and sweet. The fruitfulness of that tree only came about when we watered it with all the dirty water out of our back porch. Not a very pleasant idea. But that's kind of what Jesus is saying here in this text.

When we're trying to lead productive lives, the core of our productivity doesn't get nourished and the gardener in this particular case says give me one more year, I'll dig around the tree and I'll put fertilizer on that tree and water that tree and actually in all honesty, the New Testament translation for fertilizer is manure. We kind of streamlined that word because we're not sure what to do with manure and worship. So it's translated fertilizer but the real word is manure and you can put your own word in there if you want.

Productivity is an important part of human life. Can you imagine a human life that isn't productive? We don't have high regard for people that are not productive.

When we look at the beginning of the Scriptures in the book of Genesis, we see that God expects humanity to be productive. God gives a direction in the very early part of creation to have dominion of the world and to garden in the garden that God has given humanity. To be fruitful and multiply. And so there is a call to productivity

thing. It's the presence of God and that's the source of the best productivity.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, in these moments now, may you teach us the balance of fruitful life through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

productive plant. In some ways we're going to have to deal with the meaning of that manure.

People ask me the question so often, why is there so much stuff in my life? Why is there so much manure in my life? It could be that the parable is being lived out in you. God's giving you one more year, in the deep stuff, to work out your fruitfulness for good. I was tempted to retile this sewer, yeah, that's a Freudian slip, sermon, I was tempted to retile this sermon "Manure Happens". And I know I'm going to hear about this sermon later on, I know it, but it's too good to resist. God doesn't just allow that, God actually encourages the gardener to bring it on, so that our deep fruitfulness of our relationship with God will grow and bring meaning to all the other productivities of our life.

So hear me loud and clear, there's absolutely nothing wrong with good work and great families. To the call of Genesis on the sixth day to be fruitful and multiple and have dominion over the earth, wonderful things. But we shall not forget the seventh day call to be in God's presence and what did Jesus do after this story of the parable on the seventh day, the Sabbath day, the very next story in Luke? He heals a woman on the Sabbath day in protest to the church of his day. They had gotten their priorities so warped, that they forgot that the priority of the Sabbath, was to be in relationship to a healing God. Sometimes, we in the church, can get so distorted in our priorities that we forget it's really all about a relationship on the seventh day with a living God. As Isaiah says, everyone is thirsty; everyone who wants to have something significant of nourishment in their lives, come and buy the food that doesn't cost any-

around our work and around our family, but that's not where productivity is rooted, because on the sixth day, God says everything is very good, including the work and the family and everything that humanity has been given to do, but then something happens on the seventh day that's rather special. On that seventh day, what is often called the Sabbath, the day of rest, God comes down and walks with human beings in the cool of the day.

God initiates a relationship with humanity that is foundational to our ability to be fruitful in other parts of our lives. In other words, there are three dimensions to our fruitfulness from the very beginning of creation. Our work, our family, but more deeply, our relationship with a loving God. Without the relationship with a loving God, the family and the work become distorted. We lose the third dimension. Think of productivity in 3-D imagery. Work, family, but beyond all that is the third dimension of a deep, resounding relationship with God that keeps us planted deeply in the right priorities of life. God wants that relationship. And when Jesus speaks to this or Isaiah speaks to this in the Scripture, the call is for us to come into the presence of a loving God, come and buy things without money, come and enter freely into the presence of a God who will nourish us to the depths of our souls and allow God to be the gardener that is able to make us productive in all other parts of our lives.

Right after those passages in Genesis comes a moment of non-productivity. Cain and Abel are in their gardens, doing what they think is productive and Cain gets frustrated because Abel is better at the work than Cain is. And so Cain in his competitiveness says there's only one way to deal with this, I'm going to get rid of my

brother; I'll get rid of the competition. He rejects his relationship with God and he rejects his relationship with his brother and he focuses on his productivity to make things happen. It is no accident that after Abel is killed that Cain goes off and builds cities. He is very productive. He is productive with a vengeance in the world. He is productive in the arts and in architecture. He builds the great cities of the world and in the story the point is this, if you call your brother, you can really make yourself really productive and successful in this world.

Now there are a lot of contemporary applications for that today. If we look at productivity, if we look at our work and our ability to make money over against our ability to invest in the Sabbath presence of God, we will begin to be distorted and we will begin to function out of the wrong priorities of life. There is absolutely nothing wrong with great work and great families. But there is something wrong with great work and great families without a great God. And that third dimension is the presence that balances and makes valuable and right all the other productivity of life.

Let's face it. One of the temptations that we have is to be like Cain. We want to be so competitive to get what we want and need in life, that we're willing to do in our brothers and sisters to get it.

My father had a business that was production machinery business. All of his sons grew up to learn the production machinery business. I learned to be a great producer of airplane parts. I could make them faster on a turret lathe than my brothers could. One day I was running that turret lathe so fast that my dad came

in and stopped me suddenly and said why didn't you talk to me before you started running this job? And I said well I was having too much fun running the parts. He said that's great except you've made them all wrong. I had scrapped 100 wonderful parts for airplanes. You really didn't want to fly the airplane I was preparing you for. I had neglected the relationship part of the job, being connected to my dad to make the parts. In his work, people competed so much for the job work with each other, that they were willing to sacrifice their friendships and their families in order to get the job. And my dad concluded at one point in his life, my relationship with God and my relationship with my family is more important than my relationship to work and sometimes he didn't get the job.

It is a competitive world and we are tempted to let competition and the priorities of making the money and providing for the family our number one responsibility and it shall not ever work well in this world if we do that. Because at the heart and depth and rootedness of productivity is a call into the seventh day relationship with the living and loving God who says if we have a relationship than all the other dimensions and productivities of life will make sense and have balance.

Now as you're reading the story of Jesus, you must deal in some way with that moment where Jesus tells the story of the parable and in the story of the parable, the tree is not producing fruit. The owner of the tree wants to say to the gardener, get rid of the tree but the gardener comes along and says now, don't be too hasty. If you just give me one more year with this tree and I can dig around it and water it and I can put enough manure on it, I think we can get a