

In South Carolina, I read a story as I started this sermon and I was pretty much in shock and it does take a lot to shock me. Two teens, a 14 yr old and a 17 yr old, were arrested for shooting a 6 week old puppy with a bb gun. The vet found 18 bbs in the puppy's body and the puppy is too young for surgery so the bbs have to stay in the body and hopefully will not cause any more issues. The good part of this story is that the punks have been arrested and the puppy already has a new home.

So if we have the same mindset as the people in the gospel reading, then that puppy must have done something pretty bad to be shot 18 times. Sounds pretty ludicrous doesn't it. I don't think there is anyone who would argue that the puppy deserved to be shot. Unfortunately for the puppy, he was around two idiots who thought it would be fun to shoot a puppy.

Or what about Hesston? A guy was served a protection order because of something he was accused of doing against an ex-girlfriend. So he got mad and started shooting people, at least that is what they think triggered that whole mess. Three innocent people died along with the shooter and 14 others were admitted to hospitals. Did they deserve to be shot?

Did those 17 people cause the shooter to be served the protection order? I am guessing not, but they were still shot and three died because of one individual. The shooter was the only person that was shot and killed as a direct result of his sins.

In Jesus' day, people believed that stuff happened to you because you sinned. Every bad thing that happened in life was put squarely on you. It was your fault so God punished you. If you got a disease, it was because you sinned. If you lost a job, it was because you sinned. If somebody died, it was their fault because they sinned. Every bad thing that happened was because of your sins.

Jesus pointed out to them as well as to us, that we all are sinners and we are not punished because of our sins. In fact, Jesus tells a parable that explains that God does everything possible to help us produce good fruit.

A man had a fig tree and each year he went out to see if it had yielded any figs. And so after years of receiving nothing from the tree, the man told his gardener to cut it down and get rid of it. The gardener asked the man to wait one more year and he would dig around the tree and fertilize it and see if that would help. Obviously, the man represents God who desires the trees to bear good fruit. The gardener represents Jesus who works to take care of the tree so that it may produce. And that would make us the trees.

We are the ones who do not always bear good fruit: we don't always do things right. But instead of cutting us down, God gives us one more year. That is the hope for this day. We know we sin and God definitely knows that we sin. But out of his love for us, God gives us more time. We are cared for and tended to just like the gardener tended to the fig tree.

But what exactly does that mean? It means that God does not give up on us because each year that we do not bear good fruit, then Jesus says to God, "Give me one more year."

I was visiting with someone on facebook a while back about what is the best way to help bring somebody to God. This person had a friend who contacted him about wanting to know more about God because of posts on facebook. In this particular example, the friend is the tree and the gardener is the person who talked to me.

There are times when we are the tree and other times when God uses us as the gardener. It doesn't matter which role we are in because we are all in need of nourishment, in need of being tended to.

And again we can ask, what does that mean or look like? I think it is different for all of us because we are all fed differently when it comes to our faith but there are some things that should be common for all.

As I share this list, this is my own opinion and there are numerous other ways in which we can be fed or cared for spiritually.

First is prayer. We need to talk to God about all things, good and bad, that is going on in our life. God cares for you a great deal and hurts when you hurt and rejoices when you are happy. Talk to HIM about what is going on in your life and be open to where HE might be leading you.

I also think that spending time reading the Bible or doing devotionals is also a good way to be cultivated because you will read stories of how God interacted in others. You will be able to see similarities between your life and theirs and know that since God was active then, that HE is active now.

I also feel that gathering together as the Body of Christ is another way in which we are cared for. We come together for worship, for fellowship, to help others, to play and to eat. Wherever two or more are gathered, the Body of Christ is present through them. It is in this Body that we are taken care of as we continue in our life.

We are like the fig tree in that Jesus tends the soil around us so that we may yield good fruit. Even when our fruit is bad, Jesus is at work within us offering forgiveness and hope so that our fruit may be good.