



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

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## ***“What’s in Your Wallet?”*** **Sermon on Luke 13:1-9**

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*Luke 13:1-9*

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ <sup>8</sup> He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

What’s in your wallet? Credit cards, debit cards, driver’s license, fishing license, maybe some dollar bills. Some of you still carry dollar bills; I’m proud of you. What’s in your wallet? Some old receipts, a gift card, prescription card, that folded-up Post-it Note with all your passwords on it. That’s always good to have in an emergency, like when your wallet gets stolen.

I was clearing out my wallet the other day and found a coupon for a free Chick-fil-A sandwich that, if I lived in Brentwood in October of 2019, might have come in handy.

In my wallet, I found a card that is the same orange as the Chance card from the Monopoly game. Well, it was a Chance card. It has Anselm's theory of atonement on one side, and on the other side, it says, "Get out of Hell Free." I keep the card; maybe I'll use it for a Presbytery meeting someday. I don't know. I'm joking.

I also have in my wallet a business card that is all white and has only two words: "Stop Talking." It was given to me mid-sentence by Moe Hill. It's things like this that keep me from being a universalist.

I'm curious about the wallet of the man in our parable today. What do we know about him? His address is that of vineyard. He has on his calendar to go out and survey the vineyard at least once a year. What he carries with him is a desire for others to see what he sees. "See here! See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none."

He has as part of his identity some degree of forgiveness. After all, he goes to the vineyard one year - no fruit, two years - no fruit, a third year - no fruit. One, two, three strikes and you're out. Extra chances. It's part of who he is. What do you think? Is that fair? Unless extra chances aren't always a good thing.

About 26 years ago, I had a neighbor who said to me, "I don't understand it. I notice that your kids always come in when called. We have to keep yelling at our kids." I replied, "One strike and you're out." He said, "What?" "Oh year, if they don't come in, the receive 'the mother's eye.' Beth just gives them 'the eye'. I've only seen it once. You don't want it." That neighbor never spoke to me again.

But the vineyard owner in the parable had a long leash, three strikes and you're out. Part of his identity is that he is an employer. He hires someone to do his dirty work. We might surmise that he is one who likes to keep his nails clean and his hands soft. Ordering his gardener to get to work. "See here! Three years! No fruit! Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?"

Cut it down! It's part of his identity. It's wasting soil. Part of his identity. He carries money in his wallet. He looks at life through a monetary lens. He cares not for the tree's shade or structure. No heart for the life that is before him. Cut it down! It's wasting the soil. The tree is about business. If it isn't contributing to society, it is of no use, and usefulness is important.

My children are trained on usefulness. We would watch "Thomas the Tank Engine." I loved that show. I love trains. It was hosted by Ringo Star. And it was all done on this beautiful model train set. Train engines with personalities. There was Thomas, James, Percy, and Henry. Every program had a task that the engine needed

to complete. To get the cargo from here to there. To repair the rotten track. To get over the bridge. Every episode had a task. And every episode, the compliment to the engine was always the same: "You're a very useful engine."

I like that. And so after the show was over, I'd look at my young son and say, "Michael, you're expensive now, but I know that one day you'll be useful." A utilitarian view of life. Usefulness is how we look at one another. We measure one another often by our usefulness. Some people are more useful than others.

It was never clearer to me than when I first traveled to the infirmary in Jamaica. It was a large, white concrete building, tucked in behind the mountains. As I drove up, they were hosing off people, naked people, people who were no longer useful. Why? Well, they were mentally ill, some had diabetes and had lost their limbs, rendering them no longer useful. Some of them were just old, no longer useful because they were old.

The Church came to the infirmary and said, "We're not going to say that a person's worth is measured by what they give. We're going to measure the quality of life by what we can give." That's just part of the identity of the church; it's what's in our wallet. We carry a cross.

In the vineyard, the owner says, "Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?"

The gardener. Now, I want to see what's in his wallet. I'm not sure he carries with him a whole lot of awareness. I suspect that he's reported to work at least five days a week. What's he been doing all these years? It's not like he hasn't been paying attention. He doesn't seem to understand that the fig tree is there for business purposes. It's only when the landowner says something that he begins to do something about it. Awareness - is that something that's in our wallet? Now we're aware that Ukraine has refugees. We're aware, and we're going to do something about it. Were we aware of the refugees in Haiti, Sudan, or Central America? What does our awareness say about us? What do we carry in our wallets?

Lack of awareness. Is that what the gardener has? But then again, if you think about it, the gardener works in a vineyard. The gardener may have thought that his job was all about grapes. Now he has just learned that figs are also in his job description.

What's in the gardener's wallet? Boldness. When the boss says, "Cut it down," he refuses. "I refuse to take your order." And then he says, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do." What kind of employee says that to their boss? I mean, what's the definition of a boss? A person in charge! You listen to the boss.

It's similar in aspect to the documentary about Putin that I saw this week. He assembled his whole cabinet and asked them one-by-one what they thought about going to war with Ukraine. And with the television cameras on them, they shivered in their shoes and said, "Yes, I think that's a good idea, boss."

The gardener says to his boss, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." He appears to be 365 days more patient than his boss. That could be in his wallet. Four strikes and you're out. That could be in his wallet. He may be thinking that while he can postpone the judgment day, there will still be a judgment day. But what kind of judgment day will it be? Look at the gardener. There's something missing in his wallet. For he replies, "It's under my care. I'll dig around it, and if it bears fruit, well, there's more joy in the kingdom if it bears fruit. But if not, boss, let me tell you, you can cut it down. You cut it down. Tree removal is not part of my job description. I carry no ax."

Has it not been made clear to us that our Lord's identity is wrapped around saving the lost? Tell me, when do you give up on someone who is lost? After one day? After three years, or four? At what point does the father quit leaving the porch light on for the prodigal son? At what time does the father quit scanning the horizon and hope that one day his son will come home? When do you give up on the lost? Never give up! The business card is about finding and saving the lost. That's Jesus, 24/7, 365 days of the year for ever and ever, amen."

Apparently, for Jesus, it was a dangerous job. I've heard it said that Jesus went into ministry for one year, two years, three years, now that's it. Three years, and he's out. "Cut him down!" It seems, according to the story, we found him fruitless.

We have little patience for him in how we deal with others. Cut him down.

We run out of patience with him when he tells us how we should deal with our enemies - turn the other cheek. "You must be kidding me!" Cut him down.

We have little patience with him when he gets into our wallets, and instructs us to give all that we have. No. Cut him down.

But, what's in God's wallet? The Lord knows that when it comes to stumps, there shall be a root that comes out of dry ground. What's in God's wallet is resurrection. What's in God's wallet is your photo, and my photo, for we are all children of God.

And this, too, becomes our identity, for we carry that love. The generosity of giving is there in our wallets. For to whom much is given, much is expected. You'll find in our wallets that we're organ donors, giving body and blood for others in need. There's a "Get out of Jail Free" card for those who sin against us. The credit goes to God for all the light that shines through us. Our password is always grace upon grace. And I'll stop talking now.