

“The Fig Tree”

It was the summer of 2003, the sun was darkened, the moon did not give it's light, the firestorm was like an apocalyptic monster consuming everything in it's path. I was there. I saw it. I still vividly remember wondering if the whole city of Kelowna would be consumed by fire.

So when Mark describes the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in the year 70 I completely understand the imagery. But scattered through these apocalyptic images are messages of hope. So in these days, it would be good to just look at one, lest we be consumed by fear and despair.

Here is the text. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.” (Mark 13:28)

I tried to find a hymn that had figs in it, but we don't have one. And of course not, it is not native to us and so we don't learn lessons from fig trees. Too bad.

The Common fig (*Ficus carica*) is a large, deciduous, shrub or small tree native to southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean region. It grows to a height of 3-10m tall (10 – 30 feet). The leaves are 12–25 cm long and 10–18 cm across, and deeply lobed with three or five lobes.

Obviously a good size to cover yourself with if you suddenly find yourself naked. Thus the fig leaf garments were used by Adam and Eve in the garden. Fig leaves were often added by art collectors to cover up certain parts of the male and female anatomy long after the original work was completed. The use of the fig leaf as a protector of modesty or shield of some kind has entered western language.

The dominant Biblical image is one that denotes coming peace and prosperity. The prophet Micah is just one example. “they shall all sit under their own vines

and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid”. (Micah 4:4)

In the Song of Solomon it is an image suitable for a wedding. “The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” (Song 2:13)

And for those who lust for power is this poignant image from Judges, “Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree answered them, ‘Shall I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit, and go to sway over the trees?’” (Judges 9:10-11)

The fig is considered sacred by the followers of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, and hence the name ‘Sacred Fig’ was given to it. Siddhartha Gautama is referred to have been sitting underneath a Bo-Tree when he was enlightened (Bodhi), or “awakened” (Buddha). Thus, the Bo-Tree is well-known symbol for happiness, prosperity, longevity and good luck.

So when the world seems to be falling apart, we are given an ordinary and yet extraordinary image of hope—a fig tree awakening from winter. The instruction is to be awake enough to notice the coming of God in the midst of the chaos.

And if you wait and watch, you may hear the sounds of a mother in labour pains that reflect the agony of a broken world, you may hear the gentle cry of a new born child that heralds a new way of living, you may see a star that shines through the darkness giving a new hope, you will see the coming of God as you wait with expectant hope.