

A sermon preached Almaden Valley United Church of Christ  
San Jose, CA  
Date: March 7, 2010 COMMUNION SUNDAY  
Rev. Kevin M. Smith  
Luke 13:1-9 (Isaiah 55:1-13)

*Give the Fig Tree a Chance*

**I had been working for the Congressman for about three years when I was asked to take a new position as manager of the district office. In this new role I would be supervising a small staff of nine people who had the primary responsibility of helping the Congressman's constituents with their problems with the federal government. When someone was not getting their social security check, or another person wanted to apply for citizenship, or a business person was having IRS issues, or a local government wanted to build a water project the local district office would be the place they would turn to for help. District offices of congress people are the frontlines of federal assistance issues and the face of all that happens in the district. It's the "meat and potatoes" place that if the work is not done well, the congress person doesn't last long in office. My boss had the reputation of doing good constituent work and had been reelected six or seven times in a district that was just about split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. The work we did in the local office was important and we touched many people's lives throughout the years. It could be rewarding work of helping out your fellow human beings and it could also be stressful and heartbreaking at times, too, when things didn't work out for someone. And, no matter who the person was that came seeking help, we worked hard in treating everyone with respect and grace.**

**My immediate supervisor when I was the district office manager was a wonderful person and mentor to me. His name was Bob Crane. Bob grew up in Forest Grove, Oregon as the son of a UCC minister. When I took the job of manager, Bob gave me some of the best advice I had ever been given. The advice I remember most, though, was when he told me that I would often face tough decisions and that my boss the congressman was counting on me to use good judgment. And here is what he said to me, “Kevin, when you are facing a hard decision about whether or not to do something, and even if the options are clear, there is nothing so important that you can’t sleep on it.” He was telling me that if some decision is that important it’s worth it to take some time to reflect upon what you will do. “Don’t jump to conclusions,” as the saying goes.**

**That advice has held me in good stead for many years now. Like many of us I have a tendency to want to get things done and decided quickly and move on to the next thing. I can be impatient sometimes and realizing that when it comes to important decisions, like the decisions we make about our careers, our health, our children, our friends and our faith then speed and efficiency should not always be a priority. Impatience, and perhaps efficiency, is not a virtue when it comes to important decisions.**

**Jesus didn’t decide to hit the road to embark on his ministry quickly. Instead, he went out into the wilderness for forty days to reflect on where he was going and what he was going to do. And when someone came to him wanting him to pass judgment on some folks who were killed by the empire or by a falling building he didn’t rush to judgment and he certainly did not rush to condemnation. Jesus told the**

**parable of the impatient vineyard owner who wanted to cut down the unproductive fig tree in anger only to be admonished by his servant to wait a year, give it more time and love to be fruitful. Good advice can sometimes come from unexpected places. Let's sleep on this awhile, the servant could have said, before ending the life of this fig tree. Maybe it will blossom in its own time.**

**We all face important turning points and decisions in our lives. And if the outcomes we are looking for or hoping for have meaning it's worth taking some time to reflect, research, and pray. Jumping to conclusions about the future or about people is seldom productive and often can turn out to be very hurtful and damaging. Prejudice is not a good thing and prejudice is acting with "pre-judgment" without considering facts and outcomes. So often we judge people and events from a place in our brain that is the most archaic—that reptilian place in your brain that instinctively tells you to run or fight when actually it's often a lot better to take some time for reflection and study and use the creative and thoughtful portion of your brain. When we really think about it life really is too short to rush into it and lasting meaning and maturity results from taking the time to experience and reflect and savor each moment. Especially when it comes to the really important decisions in our lives that will affect other people's lives it's best not to jump to conclusions and give that fig tree a little more time. Amen.**