

March 27, 2022

4. Faith to Move Mountains — Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, NRSV

Seeking new fruit rather than propping up dying trees

JoAnn Brant interprets Jesus' action and words (his ministry) in Mark 11 as being applicable to any institution: "Once it ceases to fulfill its function, it decays and fades away" (S&L, p. 23). One such institution is the historic centering of "mainstream" Mennonite faith, practice, church governance, and biblical worldview as being from rural, ethnically focused, White culture as expressed in Western, middle-class, self-sufficient nuclear family units. These are 100 percent my people, but I'm convinced Jesus spoke his command to our fig tree some time ago.

Your two Gregs attended the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) rally in Cleveland on March 14. I don't believe anyone who attends their first PPC mass gathering can leave unchanged. This event drew diversely composed delegations from surrounding states. Black speakers and White speakers were interspersed with Scripture-referencing Christian pastors. They spoke of the personal impact of contaminated urban water; devastated mountain landscapes; young Black lives abused by systemic disinvestment; mental health needs of homeless veterans; poverty impacting health care, diet, education; pervasive results from racism; limits to voting; and the rise of Christian nationalism.

I saw in that gathering how the church as the restored fig tree can witness and lead in calling all people to godly justice.

—Greg Bowman, GMBowman33@gmail.com

We attended the same event yet saw different things. The Poor People's Campaign rally was moving. But I have been moved before. I have watched nuance and politics destroy efforts to help those less privileged. Their efforts did not bear fruit, fruit to help heal the harm.

I heard speakers lament their pain and suffering. I felt it in my soul. I also saw many who were not Christians also lamenting. So many shared an empathetic moment of unity. But we can be easily distracted. We overlook the universal hurt to focus on specific differences. The scriptural focus being on the tree not bearing fruit is a common view. But the tree was in the way, keeping another from occupying that space to produce fruit that was needed in real time.

You can determine the kind of tree by the fruit it bears. What kind of tree are you? What fruit do you bear? My blessing of being Black is nothing to fear. I hunger, I thirst, and I hurt. Still, I must bear fruit. I am called to serve the whole community.

Muslims suffer. Hebrews suffer. Hindus suffer. Christians suffer. Does my fruit help or harm?

—Greg Battle, battlegregory1@gmail.com



Gregory Edwin Battle is a 66-year-old Black American elder and AV minister at Lee Heights Community Church, Cleveland, Ohio. He is a proud father, son, husband, brother, uncle, and neighbor. Greg's favorite Scripture is Micah 6:6–8 and his favorite saying is, "Everything I know is subject to revision, especially what I know to be the truth" (*Narcotics Anonymous* textbook). We do recover.



Greg Bowman and his wife, Ellen, live as active retirees in the northeastern Ohio community and congregation where they were reared. Previously living in other rural, suburban, and urban communities has humbled and challenged Greg as to God's ways of working in and beyond "the church." He is alert for God's transforming moves in his community as he keeps on gardening.

Resources for this session

URLs in the participant guide:

- ["Can I use shredded paper in compost?"](#)
- [Patience Test](#)
- ["What If Jesus Came Today?"](#)

Salt & Light Videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. Duane Beck is the presenter for unit 1. The videos are now closed captioned, free, and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).