

Planted to Produce

This sermon was given on Saturday, March 12, 2022, by the Revd Dr Jamey Graham, Saint John Baptist Church, Columbia, South Carolina, at the Consecration of the Rt Revd Charles Francis Edgar III at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke and St. Paul in Charleston, South Carolina.

Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord, by the power of your Grace divine, let my soul look up with a steadfast hope and my will be lost in thine. Amen.

To the Chief Consecrator and Archbishop, Dr. Foley Beach, to the co-consecrators: Bishops Lawrence, White and Wood, to all other bishops, priests, pastors, program participants, members, and friends of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina. For the soon-to-be Bishop and my great friend, Charles Francis Edgar and family, greetings from my family, my wife and children who are here, from St. John Baptist Church and from the Baptist family of South Carolina.

I bring you a message this morning from our Lord from the Old Testament reading, Isaiah 61, which was so eloquently read, and from the Gospel of Luke 13. The message is entitled **Planted to Produce**, Planted to Produce.

In looking at Isaiah 61, we're compelled to ponder the question, why is God's anointed preaching the gospel to the poor? Why is God's anointed binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming freedom for the captives, releasing the prisoners from darkness? Why is God's anointed providing for those who grieve in Zion a Crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of the spirit of despair?

I'll tell you why. So he can plant them, you and I, in the earth as oaks of righteousness, so he can plant them to produce for Him. That's what Jesus is alluding to in John 15:8, saying, *"By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, so you will be my disciples."*

You bring glory to God by producing for God wherever he plants you in his vineyard. Yes, you have been planted to produce for God, soon-to-be-Bishop Chip Edgar.

You have been planted to produce and you have. God planted you to develop you as a strong Oak while you served as a curate at St. Paul's Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Then God planted you to develop you even more as a Canon pastor of the Cathedral Church of St. Luke in Orlando, Florida. Saints, look at the planting of the Lord.

Brother Chip, God planted you to produce in your first rectorship as senior pastor of St. Mark's Glenn Ellen, Illinois, and you did. The church grew from an average Sunday service worship of 175 to 450 when you left St. Mark's. Look at the planting of the Lord.

In 2004, God planted you in the Church of the Apostles in Columbia, South Carolina. It was there that 25 people committed to helping the church take root and grow in downtown Columbia, and over the next 18 years, the church grew to nearly 400 in attendance every Sunday - planted to produce.

The Church of the Apostles kept on producing in that it was able to send out 17 newly ordained priests to plant or replant churches from Seattle to Florida, the planting of the Lord. Not to mention how the Church sent out a church planter and about 40 people to plant a daughter church in Lexington, South Carolina - planted to produce.

Brother Chip, now God is planting you in a different part of the vineyard for you to produce even more for God, his Church, and his Kingdom. Now, saints, this message is not just for Brother Chip Edgar. But God has divinely planted each one of us to produce for him.

Isaiah comes to us today to show us that God has delivered you, that God has saved you, that God has set you free in a particular place for a particular assignment.

Whether you are a bishop or a priest, an elder or a pastor, a deacon or a Sunday school teacher, a choir member or a lay member, you are planted in your church, your community or your diocese to produce for God. Like the trees are designed to produce in their season. God has planted each one of you to produce in your season. So make your life count in your season. Give God the glory in your season. Make a difference in somebody's life in your season.

Think about it, Saints. Moses did what he could in his season. He led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage in his season. Then Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land in his season.

FitzSimons Allison, the 12th Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina, brought consistent orthodoxy in the Diocese in his season. Ed Salmon, 13th Bishop maintained orthodoxy and brought structural and institutional unity in the Diocese in his season. Brother Edgar's immediate predecessor, Bishop Mark Lawrence, guided the Diocese through unrelenting attacks on himself and on the Diocese. He never wavered from the truth of the Gospel, and he never wavered from the Diocese's commitment to missions in his season. And just like these servant leaders, saints, who produced in their season, each one of you must produce and bring glory to God in your season.

Don't be like the fig tree that Jesus talked about in Luke 13, 6-9. It was planted in a vineyard, a choice garden, and in three years it did not produce any fruit for the owner. What this parable says to us is that we're not only planted for a season, we're also planted for a reason. We are here to produce. We're here to serve. We're here to bring fruit and bring glory to God. Look at the text. Jesus shows us how God, the owner, planted a fig tree, the Church, in his vineyard, the world. And when God goes to the fig tree, the Church, he's expecting to find something. He's expecting to find fruit.

He's expecting to see some service, some evangelism, some teaching, and discipleship from the Church. But instead, he finds nothing but leaves. He finds rituals and no outreach. He finds worship in the Church

and no witness in the community. He finds singing on Sunday morning, but no service during the week. They have leaves but no fruit.

He finds committee meetings, but no commitment to meet real needs. They have leaves but no fruit.

He finds some so called Christians putting money aside in investments or in retirement or in a college fund, but they're not giving up their tithes and offerings unto the Lord. They have leaves but no fruit.

Then God said," Behold, these three years I've taken care of you. I've fed you by my word. I protected you from the enemy. I gave you chance after chance, and you will not produce. Behold, these three years..."

Somebody say, thank God for Grace. Oh, yes, he is gracious enough to wait on you to produce, wait on you to love your enemy, to pray for those who curse you, to do good to those who spitefully use you and forgive those who do you wrong. Behold, these three years, he's gracious enough to wait on you to live in the Word, pray in faith, fellowship with believers and witness to the world. Can't you see the grace in the text?

When justice wanted to cut us down, mercy soothed our case. When justice demanded that we should die, grace gave us another chance. Look at the grace in the text. I see Jesus in the text. When God, the owner of the vineyard, said, "Cut it down, cut the tree down." Jesus, the vineyard dresser, said, "No, let it alone this year. Let me dig around it. Let me fertilize it."

Aren't you glad that Jesus digs around us? Aren't you glad that Jesus fertilizes us? Look at the digging. When I get sluggish and slothful, he digs around me. When I get stingy and selfish, he digs around me. When I get stagnant and stale, he digs around me. When I get sinful and self-centered he digs around me to free me from sin and from those things that so easily entangle me. But Jesus does not stop with the digging and taking bad things away from me. He also fertilizes me.

He also adds value to my life. He gives me love and joy. He gives me faith and peace. He gives me patience and kindness. He gives me gentleness and forgiveness. He gives me his word and his spirit. He fertilizes me.

That's why I can say, "Can't nobody do me like Jesus! Can't nobody do me like the Lord!" Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!

Won't he pick you up? Won't he turn you around? Won't he plant your feet on solid ground? He fertilizes me. Aren't you glad that he does not want you to fail? Aren't you glad that he wants you to produce? Hallelujah! He goes out of his way, Hallelujah! He extends his grace and mercy so that you can produce.

So Church, you have no excuse! You are saved to serve. You are planted to produce.

If he can use a donkey to warn Balaam, then surely, he can use you. If he can use a Rooster to warn Peter, then surely, he can use you. So, what is your excuse for not serving the Lord? If you look at the biblical record, you will see that God used many broken and imperfect people. Abraham was old, but God used him. Jacob was insecure, but God used him. Leah was unattractive. Joseph was abused. Moses stuttered, but God used them. Gideon was poor. Samson was codependent. Rehab was immoral, but God used them. Hallelujah, Hallelujah. David had an affair and had all kinds of family problems, but God used him. Elijah was suicidal. Jeremiah was depressed; Jonah was reluctant, but God used them. Naomi was a widow. John the Baptist was eccentric, to say the least. Peter was impulsive and hot tempered, but God used them. Martha worried a lot. The Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, but God used them. Zacchaeus was unpopular. Thomas had doubts. Paul had poor health and Timothy was timid, but God used them.

So, what is your excuse? What is your excuse? If God can use these broken and imperfect people, then surely, he can use you.

Look at Jesus, Mary's baby. Jesus, the Lily of the Valley. Jesus the bright and the morning star. Jesus was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. No, he was not born in a royal family. In fact, he tiptoed in the back door of human history. He was born of a virgin, had a feeding trough for his bed, a poor carpenter for a stepfather. And yet God used him. He was born in Bethlehem, raised in the ghettos of Nazareth. Nazareth was so insignificant somebody had to ask, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And yet God used Jesus.

Jesus produced everywhere he went. He set up a headquarters in Capernaum. He turned water in the wine in Cana. He stopped the funeral procession in Nain. He opened up a supermarket in Bethsaida. He calmed a storm. Hallelujah! He calmed a storm in the Sea of Galilee. He cast out the demon in a man in Gadara. He started a crusade in Samaria. He made the lame to walk at the pool of Siloam. Look at Jesus. Everywhere he went, he produced. He gave the blind man his sight in Jericho. He raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany. Everywhere he went, he produced. And even at Calvary, when the devil meant what the devil meant for bad, God turned it around for his good. At Calvary he died for your sins and mine. At Calvary he shed his blood, and somebody cried out, what can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. At Calvary, the dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day. At Calvary, he lifted me. At Calvary, the Centurion said, "Surely this has got to be the Son of God!" At Calvary he died that we might live. At Calvary he died but I'm so glad that early Sunday morning he got up with all the power in his hands

Oh bishops, rectors, priests, pastors, deacons, teachers, Christian workers in this South Carolina Diocese, produce wherever you are. Produce where God has planted you! Keep on serving, keep on producing, keep on lifting up the name of Jesus and one of these days you will hear him say, "Well done! Well done! Well done, my good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a few things, come on up, come on up, come on up and I'll make you a ruler over many! God bless you! Heaven smile upon you! Remember you're planted to produce!