

Lent is a lot like cleaning the garage. You know one of these days you'll get around to it. Until that day comes, though, it doesn't seem to matter if the garage gets a little sloppier from time to time. But then, one day, the day comes. The weather is right, you've got a break in your schedule, and you decide, "This is it! Finally, I can take care of the garage." You open the door, back out the car, step back in and begin. Enthusiastically! For about 20 minutes. Then reality sinks in. "This is worse than I imagined. There's no way I can finish today. I'll go to a movie instead." And the garage waits.

The third Sunday of Lent is a lot like that moment 20 minutes into cleaning the garage. It will make or break the whole project. You may have begun this season thinking there are some changes you'd like to make. But now you may be at the point of deciding it's too much for this year. Maybe next year will be different.

Lent asks a lot. It asks us to change. Sometimes we carry habits that we long to get rid of, but just can't do it.

There are many reasons why this is so hard. One reason is very common: We blame ourselves. "I'm not strong enough. Other people can do it, but I just can't." There may be some truth there, but consider other possibilities as well. Our society makes it hard to change. How do you love one another in a society where comforting yourself is so important? Another possibility is that people we know don't want us to change. If you change yourself, you threaten others. They may fear they won't be able to relate to the new you, and often they try to stop you from changing. There are many reasons why it's so hard to change; it's not just our own weakness--it's society and people we love as well.

The parable of the fig tree is a parable about change. There once was a man who grew grapes. He was so successful he hired a servant to help him. He had in the middle of his grapes a fig tree, but for three years, the fig tree produced no fruit. There was no change. Finally the man told his servant, "Chop it down. It's useless." The servant said, "You never told me you wanted figs; I thought you wanted grapes. If you want the tree has to change. But the tree won't change unless what's around it changes. Let's hoe around it and manure it. Then it should bear fruit."

My brothers and sisters, in our weakness, we are barren fig trees. If we wish to bear fruit, we must change. But we'll never change unless the soil that feeds us changes. And the soil may resist. If changing yourself this Lent is as hard as cleaning the garage, ask yourself why. "Is it me? Is it someone else? Is it something around me?" Then pull out the two items you can find in any garage--a hoe and manure--and go to work.