Sunday, November 1 , 2026　Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"The Woman with a Hunchback"　Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Proverbs 3:21–35, Luke 13:6–13

❶【The Barren Fig Tree】

Today I'd like to share the stories of "The Barren Fig Tree" and "The Woman with a Bent Back." At times, Jesus taught about God's love and the right way for humans to live through His "words," and at other times through His "actions." In the Old Testament, God's teachings were conveyed in the form of words written on stone—the "Ten Commandments"—but that was only a small part of the whole. This is because it is impossible to write down everything. Therefore, the One who gave the Ten Commandments—the very essence of God—appeared in the flesh. That is Jesus. So please consider everything Jesus said and did as the new Ten Commandments. When you do not understand what Jesus said, learn from what He did. Even you, if taught through words alone, might not understand, but if taught through actions or experience, you would understand.

Now, here is the first parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none" (Luke 12:6). The "man" refers to God, and the fig tree represents us humans. For three years, God came every year looking for fruit but could not find any. Please understand that "three years" here means "every year." The fruit refers to a person's character, which the Bible describes as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). In a word, it means becoming like God. Although human beings were created by God to be good, we have been unable to maintain that good state; we have been distorted by sin and have become like the devil. As time goes on, sin seems to snowball, crimes are being committed by younger and younger people, and it feels as though human nature is becoming increasingly corrupt.
So he called the gardener and said, "Cut it down. Why should it be left to take up space?" (12:7) The gardener replied, "Sir, please leave it alone for one more year. I'll dig around it and fertilize it. Then it might bear fruit next year. If not, then cut it down." " (12:8–9) This gardener is Christ, and those who have loved you and cared for you. The fertilizer is their love, their sacrifice, and their patience. In the Old Testament, there is a passage where God declares He will destroy Israel because their wickedness is so great, but immediately afterward He says, "Ah, … how could I ever forsake you? …My heart is deeply moved, and my compassion burns within me. …I am God, not a human being—a Holy One among you. I will not come against you in wrath." (Hosea 11:8–9) He says that while evil must be judged, He feels such pity that He cannot bring Himself to do it.

●Regarding this passage, Pastor Yasuo Enomoto writes: "Love is an act that

contains many contradictions. … There is no pain in loving the righteous and hating the wicked. However, in order to love the wicked just as one loves the righteous, one must take upon oneself the burden of that wicked person's sins. Love is the power that makes this possible." This love of God was manifested in the form of the cross. It is said that God did not strike humanity, but struck His own Son.

Everyone, please listen carefully to this parable. If it hadn't been for this gardener's prayers and sacrifices, the fig tree would have been cut down that very day. Are you standing here today because of your own strength or greatness? No, it is because of Christ and the many people who are praying for you. Do not be proud. You were a tree destined to be cut down. Do not forget that there are people praying for you. Do not forget the sacrifices that have been made for you.

❷【The Woman with a Hunchback】

Next is the story of a woman with a hunchback. There was a woman who had been possessed by a spirit of infirmity for 18 years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. Jesus called her to Him and said, "Woman, you are healed" (Luke 13:12). When He laid His hands on her, her back was immediately straightened, and she was healed; she then praised God. Although the Bible was written in Greek, the Greek word for "to straighten up" also carries the meaning of "to look up." The Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible renders it as "to look up." A person with a hunched back always walks looking down and cannot look up. In other words, this woman symbolizes a sinner whose heart has been captivated by earthly things and who can no longer seek heavenly things—God and the Kingdom of God. People have lost sight of what is truly valuable and are desperately scrambling to gather things that do not last forever—things that will perish. People were created to see the light of heaven. They were not created to wander in the darkness of this world.

❸【How to Bear Fruit】

So, how can we bear fruit? During my morning prayer, I came across an interesting passage in the Book of Hosea in the Old Testament. The Lord says: "Israel is a vine left to grow wild; its fruit is like that of the vine. As it bore fruit, they built more altars; as the nation prospered, they adorned the sacred pillars. Now their deceitful hearts will be punished. " (Hosea 10:1–2) In the New Testament, Jesus said, "I am the vine; my Father is the vine-grower. … Every branch in me that bears fruit, he prunes so that it may bear even more fruit." (John 15:1–2) God, the vine-grower, tends to the vine. First, the vine is pruned to separate the necessary branches from the unnecessary ones, and the unnecessary branches are cut away. Furthermore, even among the remaining branches, though many buds may sprout, only two are left, and everything beyond that point is cut off. This is because without such pruning, the vine cannot bear good

fruit. However, it is said that Israel was like a vine left to grow unchecked. When that happens, the vine becomes diseased, its nutrients are scattered, and it produces bitter, inedible fruit. As Israel became a wealthy nation, it grew increasingly greedy, reaching out for everything in pursuit of worldly pleasures and turning to idolatry. We must not try to do everything. The time we have in life is limited. We must not try to do this and that. We must distinguish between what is truly necessary and what is trivial. And we must devote our time and lives to what is truly necessary. Those who try to do this and that will end up doing everything half-heartedly and will not bear heavenly fruit.

●A story about a woman appears in a book by Pastor Yasuo Enomoto.

"One day, a sister came to see me. Unable to bear the cold treatment she received from her in-laws, she had attempted a forced double suicide with her child. However, the child died, while she survived. Because of this, life became even more difficult for her than before. She left home and wandered about, searching for a place to die. Then, one day, she happened to come to the church. I listened to her story and was astonished. … Turning to me, who was at a loss, she asked, 'What should I do now?' At a loss myself, I replied, 'Come to church and believe in God.' Though I said this, I must admit, to my shame, I had absolutely no confidence in what I was saying. I was truly an unbelieving pastor. However, she began attending church. Several months later, she rushed into the parsonage. She told me that her husband—from whom she hadn't heard a single word for a long time—had come to visit her at her apartment. She managed to say only that much before bursting into loud sobs. She was overjoyed. Because of this, her family's hearts hardened even further, and her desperate efforts to be forgiven were in vain. They simply rejected her coldly, saying, "We cannot take a murderer into our home." Yet no matter what humiliation she endured, she continued to pray for the day she would be accepted. This went on for over a decade. And recently, she wrote that her mother-in-law had finally come to visit her. She shared her joy with me. The letter was streaked with tear stains here and there."

People cannot bear good fruit by their own strength. They may bear worldly fruit—such as worldly success, prosperity, and financial wealth—but such fruit cannot be taken into heaven. To bear God's fruit, we must remain connected to God. That is why Jesus said, "I am the vine… unless you remain in me, you cannot bear fruit" (John 15:4). The woman whose child had died humbly accepted the pastor's advice. Rather than trying to solve her problem through various other means, she resolved to obey God. As a result, God enabled her to bear the rich fruit of reconciliation. Hearing this story, let us also take courage. Do not waste God's grace; while there is still time, stand firm before God and reach out to Him. And let us put God's Word first and obey it. God will surely enable us to bear good fruit.