

Durzan Cirano / Shutterstock.com



Giving a fig

Heather Smith *reflects on* Luke 13:1-9

Sometimes things just take too long and waiting is almost unbearable. If you're keen on gardening you need patience. Take fig trees – they will not bear fruit until they are at least two years old, but some may not do so until they reach six. Luke's fig tree was planted in a vineyard, and patience is also required when it comes to vines – but not quite so much. They usually fruit at three years.

It's understandable to feel disappointed when, year after year, on returning to your lovingly planted and cared-for tree, you find nothing to reward your efforts. In the parable, the owner has had enough of waiting. The fig tree is just taking up space. But the gardener is wise. "Give it another year," he says, "I'll give it a bit of extra attention to see if it will come good."

Perhaps there are people in our congregations, workplaces or families who remind you of the fig tree – no fruit is forthcoming and you think they're not worth the effort. Some may be comparing themselves to the vines, laden with bunches of grapes much sooner, or to a strawberry plant that produces delicious red fruit in the first year. The wise gardener will give them a little tender loving care, knowing that there is still hope. May we all act as wise gardeners to those around us. 🍷

Gracious God, give us patience to wait for fruit in ourselves and the perception to know when others need our care to help them flourish. Amen.

The ordination of women

Part 3 "always a priest"

by Heather Smith

In March 1994, thirty-two women were ordained priest in Bristol Cathedral, although in fact, the first Anglican woman to be ordained priest was Florence Li Tim Oi, in Guandong, China, in 1944. Scandalously, she was forced to relinquish her priesthood when World War II ended and more male priests were available, only being recognised again in 1971. This made a mockery of the theology, "Once a priest, always a priest."

As a lay person with a small son and soon to have another, ordination was the last thing on

my mind. But something about being able to do it, somehow crystallised into "you should do it". In September 2000, I began my theological training.

Although some congregations still do not accept women, for the most part they are warm and collaborative. But thirty years is a short time, and often it still feels like a man's world. I pray for the time when the Church of England is inclusive and affirming without reservation, recognising that God is not partial when gifting human beings.

Heather is a writer, editor and Anglican priest, with interests in interfaith and peace-building. 🍷

“O lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen.”

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), Dutch Roman Catholic priest, writer and theologian

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

We've moved from "sabbathing" to "frantic" in one week, as planting and hatching have all happened at once! Nine chicks have launched themselves into the world in a flurry of eggshell and cheeping and there's nothing calm about creation, after all. Every day, just like in Genesis, there's something or someone new and I'm just hoping that the sheep wait a few more weeks before they

begin lambing. Broad beans are up, chillis and tomatoes are showing in the propagator and the blackthorn in the hedges is frothing white.

I'm always astonished by the arrival of spring, even though I wait impatiently for it. I notice again how things happen in good time, in God's time, even though I'm always a bit unprepared. Learning to relax in this rollercoaster of a season is really my life's work, but I think I'll always be surprised by the joy of it. 🍷