Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



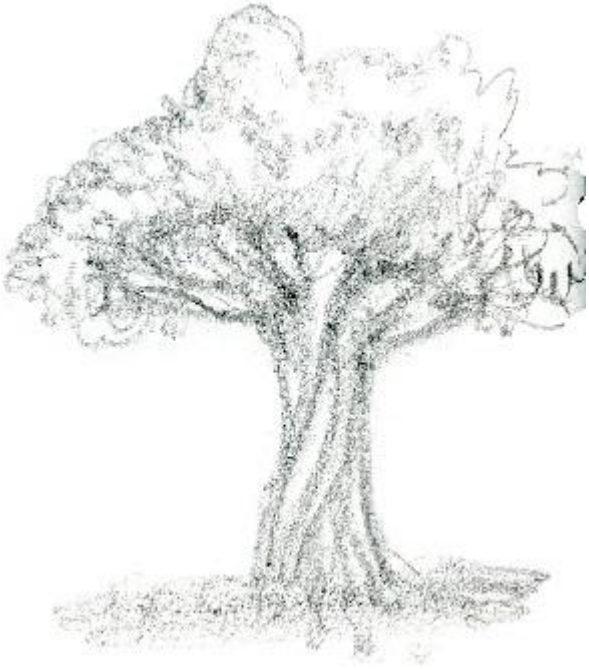
by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 1, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours” (Mark 11:25).

Sir 44:1, 9-13; *Mk 11:11-26*

In 1936, in the depths of the Depression and “Dust Bowl” years in the United States, journalist James Agee and photographer Walker Evans were hired by *Fortune m* agazine to do a story on the conditions of sharecropper families in Alabama. The result, rejected by Fortune and not published until 1941, was the book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* a powerful and achingly intimate portrait of poverty in America.

The title is from today’s first reading, Sirach 44:1, a sweeping look at history that reveals the patterns of heroic courage and tragic folly that mark human participation within God’s plan for the world. The fate of the earth lies in what human beings do with God’s gifts of free will and insight. Success leads to blessing and failure brings its own punishment according to the laws of nature. We reap what we sow.

We are facing that challenge in a major way today with Climate Change. The problem is getting people to take seriously the immense damage we have already inflicted on our world. Everything must change if we are to salvage our future.

Today’s Gospel tells of Jesus’ encounter with a fig tree on his way into Jerusalem. Lack of fruit on the tree becomes a parable for what Jesus finds in the Temple - a mall of commerce overtaking God’s house of prayer. On his way out of the city, Jesus again sees the fig tree and in frustration he curses it. He spends the night in Bethany, then returns the next day to challenge the money changers and sellers and the Temple establishment for failing to understand that their infidelity would doom the temple and the city, which were destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

Jesus told the parable of the fig tree to challenge his contemporaries to make God the center of their worship instead of a backdrop for business. But the story then takes a different turn. At what was likely the most discouraging moment in his ministry, Jesus tells his disciples that whatever they pray for, even miracles, will be given to them. Something has moved him to affirm the unstoppable power of prayer. He knows that God will bring the promised kingdom, but he also knows that the cost of that miracle was his going to the cross to offer his life for the sins of the world. Another “tree” on Calvary would hold the curse to make it the blessing of salvation for the world.

If we pray for a change in our world, we must first change ourselves. This is the first miracle that must happen. We are a small part of a much larger picture. Our commitments and faithfulness may seem of no consequence in determining the direction history takes. Faith urges us to choose courageously and to do our small part for the greater good. Pray, then act, and what you ask for and work for will be

given. But, be prepared to offer yourself with God's self-emptying love in order to see it happen.