

Keep trying (Luke 13:1-9)

I relate to the servant in Jesus' parable.

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During the pandemic, rather than follow the trend of sourdough bread-making, I bought plants.

I was drawn to all types of plants and all manner of pots to house them. Every time I went to Whole Foods or Trader Joe's I picked up a plant, gathering and collecting them like little orphaned kittens, cooing at them and promising a home full of sunlight and healthy soil. Soon our counter and shelves overflowed with them. I did my best to pay attention to each individual plant and its unique needs, even downloading a plant app that would allow me to take photos so I could understand any ailments.

However, I often forgot to water some plants and overwatered others. At least two of them looked like they had some kind of fungus in the soil or discolored leaves, not to mention becoming prey to our cats, who like to chew on their stems. There is one in particular whose leaves are completely limp, and no matter how much window or water I offer it, nothing seems to work.

The logical thing would be to toss out the ones that look like they're not going to make it. But I can't.

The servant in Jesus' parable of the fig tree understands me: "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it." The servant believes that if he moves the dirt around, enriches it with fertilizer, and pays more attention to it, then

something might happen.

In other words, let me keep trying. Not for the sake of my ego, but for the sake of living. Because, yes, it's a small thing, and perhaps a stretch—but I know what it means when people don't give up on me.

And this is where I experience persistent welcome and acceptance the most: in the simple presence of dirt. Barbara Brown Taylor knows and writes about this in her memoir *Leaving Church*:

To lie with my back flat on the fragrant ground is to receive a transfusion of the same power that makes the green blade rise. To remember that I am dirt and to dirt I shall return is to be given my life back again, if only for one present moment at a time. Where other people see acreage, timber, soil, and river frontage, I see God's body, or at least as much of it as I am able to see. In the only wisdom I have at my disposal, the Creator does not live apart from creation but spans and suffuses it.

And how fitting in the season of Lent to remember that I am dirt and ashes but also beloved.