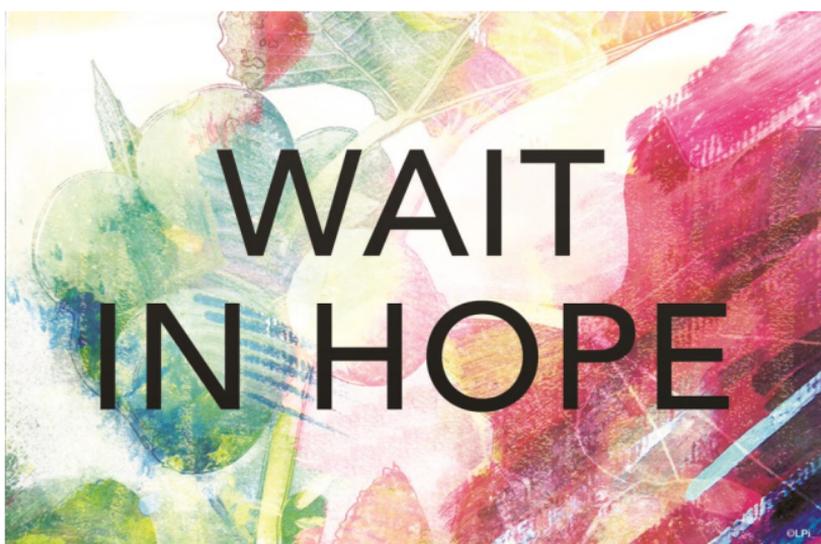


## REFLECTING ON SUNDAY'S GOSPEL



"There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it [he] found none." We live in a results-driven society. It can be easy to put pressure on ourselves to succeed. If we're not keeping up with the perceived "good life" of those around us, we feel anxious and disappointed. Some of the Gospel stories about fruitfulness can seem to play out in this fashion. "For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down." The message seems to be clear. Abide in God and bear fruit! Stand apart from God and be barren. But what happens when we're trying, but the growth we wanted doesn't seem to be coming our way? What if it feels like life just isn't bearing fruit?

This Sunday, Jesus gives us a sign of hope. "[The gardener] said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also; it may bear fruit in the future.'" How quick we can be to judge! Perhaps you started out Lent with high hopes and big ideas for getting closer to God. Maybe things haven't gone exactly like you thought. It can be easy to lose patience with our failures or slow growth. We shouldn't be too quick to assume that God has given up on us. He hasn't.

The same ideas apply to those around us. Perhaps we're the planter of the fig tree. We expect a certain amount of growth from someone in our life, and they just aren't measuring up. Let today's Gospel be a gentle nudge for mercy. As Lent continues to unfold, be patient with yourself and those around you. Wait for God to provide the growth.