

"The Next Time"
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By Rebecca Enney

Today, in my pretend story, there is a new family joining Pastor Ed's church. "After worship today," said Pastor Ed, "there will be refreshments in the Gathering Space. Be sure to stop by and welcome Mr. and Mrs. Bug and their son Obadiah into our congregation."



Mr. Potato Head walked right up to them after church and said "Well, well, well! Welcome! Sorry I don't have much time to chat with you, but I've got to take my little Tater Tot to her Girl Scout meeting. Perhaps your little insect would like to come along?"

Obadiah's father said "Thank you for the invitation, but actually our SON already is in a scout troop. It's nice to meet you though Mr. Potato Head."

Then Aunt Gertrude came up to Obadiah's mother and after introducing herself she said "I'm in charge of serving meals to families after they have a funeral here. Would you be interested in helping with that ministry?" Obadiah's mother said "I might be. Here is my phone number. Call me some time."

Mr. Mawakasunga was going to welcome them, but he got to talking about Council business to Mr. Gym Teacher and never took the time. And Mr. Gym Teacher always gets nervous and never knows what to say to new members so he was glad he didn't have the time to welcome them.

The Church Secretary is deathly afraid of insects, so she did not even consider welcoming the new members. "I just don't like their buggy eyes," she said to herself. And then she added "They have too many legs too!"



Sometimes we are friendly to the new person. That is a good thing. However, sometimes we make excuses and we are unfriendly. That is NOT a good thing.

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus tells the story about a fig tree that did not grow any fig fruit. The man who owned the tree came looking for figs on the tree and finding none, said to the gardener "Cut it down. What good is a fig tree if it doesn't grow figs? It's nothing but a waste of dirt!" You'll notice that the man only expected figs. He did not expect apples or grapes or oranges.

When Jesus tells a story like this, you always have to figure out what it means. Of course a fig tree would not grow apples or grapes or oranges. But it certainly SHOULD grow FIGS! I think this means that God does not expect us to do anything we can NOT do. He DOES, however, expect us to do what we CAN do! If we call ourselves a Christian, then we also should bear fruit. Being friendly to new folks at church is a fruit that God expects from us.

Mr. Potato Head and Aunt Gertrude were both friendly in their own way.

Unfortunately, sometimes we are like the fig tree that produced zero fruit. Sometimes we are like Mr. Mawakasunga or Mr. Gym Teacher or The Church Secretary and produce zero friendliness to new folks.

It's a good thing in the Gospel lesson that the Gardener speaks up for the fig tree and says "No, don't chop it down. I'll work with it for another year. It will do better next time!"

There are always times we fail to do what is best. It is a good thing that Jesus says "Give this person another chance. I died for this person. They will do better next time!"



Thank you, Jesus, for the promise of your love and forgiveness and the opportunity for “the next time.”

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