

Sonia Halbach
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Jacinta and I have known each other since freshmen year and both have been involved with theater our entire time at Augustana, so when first asked to do this joint senior sermon, I think our theatrical sides initially thought to make it more of a dialogue and ideally be almost like an acting scene. However, realistically, Jacinta has been acquainted with me long enough to know that had we chose to do that instead of each taking turns, I would have just cut her off half the time, which is also probably why we thought it would be best if I spoke first.

I don't interrupt on purpose, it's just once a thought pops in my head it has to come out no matter how unrelated it is to the topic at hand. More times than I can probably count, Jacinta and I have been walking across campus and she's telling me a really interesting story or incident that happened to her that day, and I suddenly chime in with some analytical comment about how the current weather reflects my emotionally state on this very day two years ago. Because besides the ability to remember sometimes the most silly and insignificant details, Jacinta also knows I'm constantly finding symbolism in every day life. And I blame this uncontrollable habit on my English major.

One example of me trying to find the hidden meaning happened during my first week of college when a wristwatch I had received as a graduation gift stopped working out of the blue. Being new to the Sioux Falls area, I instantly Mapquested a watch repair shop, but when I took it in they said it was an issue that couldn't be fixed, and yet were at the same time stumped as to what exactly the problem was with it. As the year progressed I purchased a handful of other watches, only to have the band tear, or the battery completely stop, or I swear sometimes, the whole watch would just implode and vanish into thin air within days of buying it. And while most people would just blame perhaps the low quality of these products sold at large discount departments stores that shall remain nameless – I couldn't help but feel that God was sending me a sign early in my college career. And it was – slow down. Time will come and go no matter what – but don't make it your main focus. So I tried not to.

At the beginning of my sophomore year, a local church was handing out New Testaments around campus. Like many of my classmates, I smiled and politely took a copy, though knowing fully well that once it came back to my dorm room it would only collect dust on a shelf or get lost in the great abyss of my dirty laundry-covered floor as so many things often did. But before I could sentence the book to that doomed fate, I flipped it open and instantly came upon the parable of the barren fig tree. Although this chapter in Luke is often connected with repenting sins, at the time it struck a chord with me for different reasons.

I had just finished my first year of college, and I couldn't help but wonder, what will become of me when the vineyard owner comes calling three years down the road? Will my time at Augustana, where I am nurtured and fertilized in the protective boundaries of the classroom and campus, cause me to bear any fruits of knowledge, or will I be charged with wastefully taking up the ground and simply cut down?

This parable and these questions stayed with me the next few years of college, and as you can see amazingly the same New Testament book did as well. But as I began my senior year last fall, I realized I had reached my three years, and I waited for the vineyard owner to come and ask what my time at Augustana had produced within me, if anything at all. Except to my surprise, the people seeking these fruits were neither my professors, my family, nor my friends, like I had always suspected. Instead it was me. I became my own vineyard owner. I came to myself at the start of last September and throughout this entire year trying to find some tangible fruits of knowledge and demanding to see evidence of growth. But to no avail. So then the panic starts and as this last semester quickly passed I worried, if at the end of this final year I bear no fruits, will I, too, be cut down?

We never find out what happened to this fig tree after its fourth year was up. And with a month to go before graduation, I begin wondering of my own fate. But I think there is a reason we aren't given an ending to this parable. It's the same reason God gave me during my freshmen year when I learned that even in world of paper deadlines and busy class schedules that I shouldn't become obsessed with time. You see, as much as I search for symbolism in my every day life and look for that definite moment where things all make sense and I have some concrete proof that my time here was well spent, there's one thing I overlooked.

When graduation arrives May 22nd and I go up to get my diploma regardless of whether or not I successfully produced any fruits of knowledge, I'm not going to be cut down. I'm going to be cut free. Because, thankfully, God doesn't give us a deadline for having all the answers.