

The Orchard of Life

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Bridgeport Family Church



Good morning, everybody. It is good to be back here again. I know later in today's program we will have time to say nice things about Chris and Christine [Hempowicz], but I want to begin by thanking them for their many years of service. Thank you so much.

Also beginning a new round of service for True Parents, I want to acknowledge Richard and Marjorie Buessing. Richard is newly a Special Emissary and Itinerary Worker, so welcome, Richard.

I just came back from Korea via Shanghai and London and I'd like to share with you about some of the things that I learned and pondered about while I was with True Mother in Korea. I think many of you may have seen some of her messages that are on our website and also had the opportunity to watch the video. One thing that she's been talking a lot about is about the importance of having roots of faith. And as it's almost Easter time, I wanted to build on that and also think about what comes after we've developed strong roots because of course the harvest of the tree is more than just roots. It grows to have a strong trunk, healthy, strong branches, and eventually, fruit. That's the point of having a tree.

About 45 years ago, True Mother and True Father paid a visit to Jerusalem and by that time it was not in Israel, it was in Jordan. That visit made a very deep impact on True Mother, particularly her visit to the Garden of Gethsemane. By the way, how many people here have had the opportunity to travel to Israel and see that garden? Just a handful. One of the things that I learned when I went there for the first time was that olive trees are ugly. [Laughter] Especially when they're 1000 years old or more. They get twisted and turned and bare. They're not the most beautiful of trees, but True Mother was really impressed by one particular fact about the olive tree—it manages to flourish in some of the harshest conditions on Earth. In fact, she emphasized, a new olive tree spends up to 15 years trying to find water. Not one year, not three years or five years, but 15 years of sending roots down into the Earth—because there's so little water available.

True Mother said, last week, "How is it possible, in this barren, harsh environment, the olive tree can plant its roots so deeply, and then survive for more than 1000 years?" She mentioned, if after 15 years the olive tree can't find sufficient water it may take another 15 years in this relentless pursuit for the water of life. It won't grow, it won't develop fruit, it won't spread out any branches, until and unless it can find that deep water.

In the Bible Jesus talks quite a bit about the trees and seed and often compares the Kingdom of God to a plant or a tree. I'm sure you remember the parable of the sower of the seed. The sower went out to sow the seed, but not all of the seed was successful. Some fell on rocks, and the birds came and ate it up right away. He explained that that's like the people who hear the Word but then the devil comes to take it away before it even starts to settle, before they even start to think about the importance of God's Word, it's taken away and you think about something else instead. And then you have the seed that's planted on shallow ground, and it grows up quickly, but then it dies quickly because it never sent its roots down in

the soil where it can survive the drought. There are many types of other unsuccessful seed, which I'll come to later.

Clearly, putting down deep roots for ourselves, roots of faith, is very important. This allows us to survive in times that are difficult—times of drought, when there frankly isn't much nourishment. Personally I feel that in the years since True Father ascended into the Spirit World, I've found myself often in a time of spiritual drought. The days when it was possible to spend time with True Father and drink deeply of his wisdom, and sometimes his humor, and his love are not with us anymore. It's a time of drought.



Chris and Christine Hempowicz

Drought sometimes lasts not one or two years; for those living in California, there's been a drought going on for eight years now. If you have deep roots planted down in that reservoir of truth then you can survive a drought. You can survive two, three, four or more years, but if not, then you won't survive. You'll start to fail. That doesn't mean to say it's too late, but if you find yourself today in a spiritual drought, or even this year, I think it's important to remember this first rule of the fruitful life.

We need to have deep roots and True Mother gave us some guidance on how to deepen them. One of the key things is to pay extra attention to the Word of God, especially as it's revealed in the books of scripture that True Mother has prepared. Only eight days ago, all the big ceremonies surrounding Foundation Day were over and we were with her in the Cheon Jeong Gung, and it was a moment of reflection. True Mother said, "True Father left us with 900 books. Has anyone here read them all?" She said, "I haven't, but it's almost too much in a way. What we need is to have the essence, the core."

I think all of us may have some favorite part of God's Word or True Parents' words. Certainly you should hold on to that. It may or may not be in these new books of scriptures, but if you have a favorite passage that you go to again and again to seek inspiration, you should strengthen and develop that and I urge you to share it with others as well.

What True Mother wanted to do was to get a broad sense of the best that True Father had to say, to gather in one place that would be available to everyone. The last of those books, in case you don't know, is called the Cham Bumo Gyeong. It's True Parents' life story and their own encounter with God, in their own words. That's the third book in the series.

Right now, our American family has been given the blessing and the opportunity to translate and prepare that for the whole world. True Mother made it very clear, the English version is the most important version of all. You might think, surely it's the Korean version—that's the original text—but True Mother said the English version is the most important because from that will come all the other translations—the French, the Spanish, the Russian and the Chinese.

David Rendel, whom we welcomed earlier, is the songwriter of *Sailing with Our Father*. He's also the coordinator to translate the Cham Bumo Gyeong. We have more than 20 people working on translation

and editing. It's such an important project. I'd like to invite you to pray for him and to pray for the project so that the best of True Father's words can be made available.

A few months ago I made the decision to read those books, front to back. It took 40 days, reading 100 pages a day. It's almost 4000 pages. Of course during that time I didn't do much work. Those of you who see me in the office might have noticed I didn't seem to be doing any work. I was only reading, but I felt it was important for me to grasp what's going on here.



Richard Buessing

I particularly liked seeing how True Father educated people over time. In the early years, he spoke about big themes like the unity of the sciences—something that every scientist can resonate with and think about. For two or three years, True Father stayed on a strictly secular level: how it's important to combine knowledge and to work together and share. Then, he started to talk about values and science, how important it was that scientific development was guided by principles and values. Otherwise you can end up, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “with guided missiles and misguided men.” The knowledge is put to a bad purpose.

True Father didn't stop there. After talking about values he went on to examine the source of values: where does value come from? He spent two or three years talking about that, and then he started to talk about God. In twelve years, since the beginning, True Father has built a relationship with the scientists and Nobel laureates, and now he's encouraging them to think about God. He didn't start there, but he built up. After that he started to talk about the providence of God, to teach them that they had an important role to play and that God's providence is not just the responsibility of religious leaders, priests and ministers but it is also the responsibility of scientists, academics, scholars and teachers. In fact, it is all of our responsibility. This is a bit of a digression but in order to build roots of faith, it is important to have a daily relationship with the word of God.

True Mother is trying to make that easy for us, but it still requires our effort and commitment. This is one thing that she shared: carefully take time to read the word of God, and if you find something that inspires you, please share it. This is not something that we do by ourselves.

However, just having strong roots is not enough. So now I'd like to read you a scripture from Mark 11, verses 12 and 14. And the setting is Passion Week, the week before Jesus was to be crucified. On Palm Sunday he'd been welcomed by crowds, thousands of people coming onto the streets with palm leaves, welcoming him as the king to Jerusalem, saying Hosanna to the highest, here is the king we've been waiting for. Now we're on Tuesday morning, just two days later, and Jesus is on his way into Jerusalem. The next day, this is Mark 11: “As they were leaving Bethune, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find if it had any fruit. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And his disciples heard him say it.”

Okay, so that's a fig tree, not an olive tree, but I've always felt rather connected to this verse. It's early morning, Jesus is hungry—everyone says that breakfast is the most important meal of the day—and he's hoping for breakfast from this tree, but there's no fruit, and not surprisingly perhaps this turns out to be a very bad day. It's always a bad day when you miss breakfast. That was the day that Jesus went into the

temple and found himself in direct conflict with the leaders of Israel—the scribes, the priests. That was the day he overturned the tables in the temple court and chased out the money changers. It was dramatic; perhaps in the moment it was exciting, but after just one day there was a contract out on Jesus's life. People started to look for a way to kill him. Just 48 hours after the triumphant entry, things had flipped 180 degrees, and now people are trying to kill the Lord.

When I was in seminary in UTS, we learned that this type of saying of Jesus is one of what is called the “tough sayings.” Scholars of Jesus wonder how much of what's written in the Bible really came from Jesus, and how much of it was added in later. One of the tests that religious scholars use is whether what Jesus is saying is popular, politically correct, and comfortable or if it's really challenging and difficult to swallow. The consensus is if it's popular, easy to understand and makes you feel good, he probably didn't say it; but if it's really challenging and makes you think, did he really say that? Could he really have cursed people like that? Could he really have cursed a tree? Why did he do that? That probably means that is something that actually happened.



That fig tree represented Jesus, the whole preparation God had made for his coming. The people of Israel are often compared to a fig tree. The farmer prepares his orchard so that the Messiah can come and use them as his team to build the kingdom, but as we know when Jesus came, the team was not ready. The fruit was not on the trees and Jesus ended up having to go it alone. People think this metaphor of the fruitless tree is a metaphor of the failed hope that God had at the time of Jesus. We know from the Divine Principle that God wanted him to become the True Parent, to marry, to have children of his own, to find the True Mother of his day and begin God's Kingdom based on his family; but it didn't happen. It was a time of great grief and unhappiness for God and for Jesus.

Having roots but no fruits is not good enough. At the Last Supper, Jesus went on to explain what God needs to do in order to bring fruit. That might make more sense in a rural city, but we'll have to make do in Bridgeport, where most of our knowledge of fruit and orchards and trees is rather academic. But I grew up in Kent, England, and my parents had an orchard. Every spring the key thing to do was to prune the trees, to cut back on the branches and twigs and all the unnecessary trees that were preventing growth.

Rick Warren was talking about this in his sermon last week, that in order for us to be fruitful, God needs permission from you to enter your life and do some pruning. Do you know what pruning is? I used to think that pruning is when you cut the dead wood, the things that are not working, not doing well, and get rid of the things that you are wasting time on in your life. If that were true and pruning was just cutting out things that are dead and hopeless and failed, perhaps it wouldn't hurt so much. But the truth of the matter is that real pruning cuts out what's alive. It cuts out what's growing. In John 15:1, Jesus said, “I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit, He cuts away.” (That's the dead branches.) “But every branch that does bear fruit He prunes to make it bear even more.” In other words, real pruning in the spiritual life sometimes cuts out things that look like they're doing just fine, that are doing well and actually prosper; but maybe God's perspective is a little bit different. He would like us to do something different, but we never will as long as our growth and our energy is going someplace else.

Pruning the things that are doing well but are not God's most important things in our life, that's very painful but it's very necessary. It's not optional. It occurred to me that there are times in our spiritual life

when there comes time when some bigger pruning is needed. That applies not only to individuals but to, for example, our church and our movement as well.

Some of you know that our True Mother has been vigorously pruning the projects, that over the years, True Father started but have not flourished and done well, or she feels were taking away vitality and resources for something that's much more important.

One of the things that hurt me the most was when True Mother decided to prune the soccer. Oh my God, how could True Mother cut out soccer? True Father loved it so much and invested in the Peace Cup and brought some of the top teams in the world to play. True Father's vision for that was that after a certain time, there would be sponsors and support and that many people would join and create a Peace Cup. Remember, he met with Pele and asked him to join him and create a competition that really would bring together teams from countries that were in war and conflict, to play soccer together. "Play soccer, make peace," was the slogan. Unfortunately, teams came to play and to get the prize money, but it never really worked out that other sponsors came and gave the resources that True Father was hoping for.

A couple years ago, True Mother heard a report about that and said, "You know what, I don't want to invest our resources in that way. I'd rather spend that time on education, teaching young people and raising up leaders for the future. If I could do both, I would, but if I have to make a choice, I'm going to cut out even that thing that was so precious to True Father."



Actually that takes real guts to say we're going to stop this which everybody likes and is popular, because there's something that's even more important. I'm not sure I'll ever forgive her [Laughter], but I'm working on it.

Take some time and ask yourself, "What do I need to prune this year, so that God can bring fortune and fruit in me?" It could be something that's dead and not working, that's okay. But more likely, if you just allow God in this moment to enter into your mind and heart, it might be actually something that you really like, that's important to you, and perhaps God would like you to focus on something even more precious.

One more important thing to have a fruitful year and harvest, is to pay attention to weeding. A few years ago, I bought a house. I planned to sell it and make a profit, and one of the things it didn't have was a garden, a lawn. We put a lot of effort into digging out the ground and removing all the rocks and garbage. It was a house in a city where it was pretty neglected for a long time. Then we sowed grass seed, but we emitted one important step. We should have put some weed killer down before we planted the grass seed. The next Spring it started to get green and I thought, "Yes!", but no.

How much effort does it take to grow weeds? It's a big, fat zero. To create a harvest, to grow healthy plants, takes real effort and discipline, but to grow weeds takes absolutely no effort at all. When Jesus was talking about weeds he often used to say that the enemy planted them, but actually we all have weeds in

our spiritual life. They're really a sign of neglect, that we're not paying attention to our own spiritual well-being.

Again quoting Rick Warren, he said, "I notice weeds whenever I neglect three things. The first one is exercise. If I don't take care of my physical body, if I don't eat healthy or exercise and work out, weeds start to grow. What kind of weeds? Sexual temptation, overeating, laziness. If I forget to read, to study, to have quiet time with God, other weeds come up: doubt, confusion, disbelief, despair, a feeling that things are never going to be better. There's a weed that grows if I don't have God's word in the first place in my heart. And relationships: if I don't put enough time and energy into my relationships—with my family, with my wife, with my children, at work with my colleagues and coworkers—weeds will come up. What kind of weeds? Weeds of dissent, disagreement, resentment over small, petty things."

These things are so easy to grow. We need to be diligent, even after pruning, with weeding. It takes effort, actually to stop weeds from growing—spiritual weeds, too—but lastly, and this is the conclusion of my talk this morning, we have to have faith that the harvest is going to come.

The point about the olive tree that True Mother made is that it takes 15 years of root-growing when it's ridiculous to expect fruit. It's not going to happen. Once the time has come that the roots are deep, the branches that are non-productive have been pruned, that first harvest will come. After that there should be a harvest every single year. True Mother has asked all of us to take really seriously our mission as tribal messiahs: our personal ministry to share the truth about True Parents, the good news about God and His love for all of us, with everyone we meet, every day and all the time. That's not easy. I'll profess to you honestly—maybe some of you will have the same confession—we've been dormant in that area. It's been winter too long. It's not winter anymore. This is springtime, and I believe that if we plant the seeds, if we have hope that this is the year of harvest, good fruit is going to come.

Perhaps some of you saw Sun Jin Moon's inaugural speech the other day, when True Mother appointed her to become the International President, and one thing that struck me is that she said, "I want to see my presidency marked by moving forward. A few hundred thousand members to many millions." I was so happy to hear her say that. Her emphasis is not on order or simply that we go in one way, but that we grow and we have harvest and fruit. Even though we have been through a dry season, and even though personally you maybe haven't seen much fruit lately, the hope and belief that through you God can bring a harvest is critically important. In fact, it's the purpose for being here at all. If we don't believe that good fruit is coming, if we don't believe that we can succeed, we won't.

This is True Mother's profound message: Have hope that the foundation has been laid. She trusts we all have roots of faith sufficient. The time has come to believe and hope and reap the harvest. And one final thing: the olive tree rarely grows by itself. Cultivated trees are always gathered together in orchards, and in fact the health of the whole orchard depends on every tree there. If one tree gets sick, all the trees can start to get sick. If the trees are all healthy, they can all survive and fruit together.

True Mother was interested to hear that one of the defenses that olive trees have against pests is they secrete a chemical that drives some of them away. How it works is one tree releases that chemical—maybe when it's attacked by a worm or bug—and then the other trees start to prepare themselves as well so the whole orchard can remain healthy as well. My final point is that the task that we're called to do, to be fruitful before God and True Parents, is not a solitary one. Honestly speaking, that's too difficult. It's something for this community and all communities to do together. We need to help each other fight the pests of doubt, disunity, disbelief and hopelessness, and to share the successes that God is bringing so that we can all raise up and encourage together.

My encouragement to you all this morning is, let's take this on together. The time of harvest is here, and God has a great blessing in store.