

Creation – Harvest
Psalm 1
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 23, 2018
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Psalm 1

The Two Ways

¹ Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;

² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

³ They are like trees

planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.

In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴ The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Gene and I drove over several passes this week to get to Redstone to celebrate our anniversary. In some places, the peak of leaf viewing season is DEFINITELY over - especially, where the heat and drought of this summer took its toll.

You still have a chance to do some gorgeous Colorado aspen viewing, but don't wait too long!

Dr. J Matthew Sleeth has a new book coming next year, titled Reforesting Faith that addresses the importance of trees in the Bible. Wouldn't that be an interesting study!?

Here are a couple of quotes:

- "With the exception of God and people, the Bible mentions trees more than any other living thing."
- "If I had to pick one subject other than Jesus to corroborate the inspired origin of the Bible, I'd pick trees, because while the Bible was written by

many people over numerous centuries, the consistent use of trees throughout points us to one Author.”

These are just a few insights that support Dr. Sleeth’s idea that trees map God’s story of redemption.

THAT thought alone can cause us to pay more attention to trees in the Bible and trees in God’s Creation; whether we’re planting them or picking a harvest from them.

When we read about a tree in the Bible, we could learn (even when the characters in Scripture may not) that heaven is just around the corner. And while the message title for today is “harvest” it became focused on “trees.”

When we spend time to study and read the Bible we become aware that many of the people written about are deeply connected with agriculture and the land. We can recall, in the OT, that being in the Promised Land **or** away from the land was a sign of God’s favor.

God’s chosen Israel, the people, and their land is often personified by vineyards and trees.

And in the NT, Jesus’ parables often refer to agriculture.

The final book in Scripture, Revelation, ends in a garden with God as its sustainer.

As we move through this series about Creation this month, we shouldn’t miss the connection between humanity and the earth, the insights from agriculture, or poo-poo the importance of our relationship with Creation.

When we pay attention, we won’t get caught up in the notion that the Bible’s only concern is with “spiritual” matters. Creation has something to teach us. And perhaps “harvest” is the ultimate goal...all tied TO spiritual matters and our growth.

Dr. Sleeth writes: “Trees are the only things from our childhood that get bigger when we go back and visit them as adults. Our faith should be like that.”

My personal devotional time, this week, included Psalm 1 that Ruth just read for us. (Isn’t God’s timing wonderful? What a blessing!)

This “song” is short and well-known and, I think, it reveals consequences to the basic choices we God-seekers must make. We have a choice!

The psalmist compares a righteous person to a tree.

And when we look at the TREES in God’s word (from Ezekiel to Revelation) we get recurring images of

- Tree planted by a stream,
- leaves that don’t wither,
- and abundant fruit as the tree prospers.

All these can draw us to the importance of the work of God.

Let’s look at each component of this description:

First, the tree firmly planted /by water. Those two things are critical components for long-term survival of a tree.

The root system of a tree is important for getting the necessary nutrition, but it is also the structure that anchors the tree solidly in the ground, so that it won’t be “uprooted” when storms come.

The water source is essential, too, but it’s *not just ANY* water source.

Biblically, the source is a river that is life giving.

Revelation describes the water as unpolluted and crystal clear.

Ezekiel’s calls it the “river of life” that begins at the temple and flows out toward the Dead Sea.

Visualize it.

The farther out it goes, the river gets wider and deeper.

When it flows into the Dead Sea, (this is Ezekiel’s description) the sea becomes alive (the DEAD sea) with all sorts of living things like fish **and** the fisherman who come to catch them.

The salty Dead Sea becomes fresh and alive.

It makes me think of the woman at the well asking Jesus about living water.

I want to know more!

Next, the healthy tree yields fruit.

We can recall that Jesus often says that a tree is known by its fruit.

And that un-producing branches will be cut off and burned to make room for branches that will!

Remember too, Jesus cursed a fig tree for not producing fruit (which was a metaphor for judgment on Israel) and then he told a parable about the importance of fruitfulness.

All throughout Jesus' teaching being fruitful, as followers, is always for the good of others, for "feeding" them.

Sometimes that's literal fruit for hungry people.

Perhaps, the fruit is offering companionship for someone who is lonely or hurting.

Other times, fruit is a word of hope and good news.

Be sure: THERE IS NO SHORTAGE of the types of fruitfulness.

But, Dear Ones, fruitfulness is also non-negotiable.

Since, trees are known by their fruit, if an apple tree doesn't provide apples...or an orange or a fig tree, don't produce their fruit, well, then, they're "just" a tree that's not fulfilling their purpose.

According to Jesus' teaching they risk being cut down to make room for others who will.

Finally, in Biblical descriptions of trees, they have leaves that don't wither, which is a sign of something that is eternal, never ending.

That attribute, about the unwilting leaves in the Bible symbolizes, I think, the far-reaching impact that Jesus' death and resurrection has.

- The effects of sin are overcome.
- The eternal life offered by God is always available;
- And it will sustain and cure eternally every former sin.

If we are to be righteous in the sight of God; if we're going to be a "prospering tree," then we, like Sleeth wrote, need to grow our faith and be a people who seek to prosper according to God's plan.

Prospering then, FOR US, is the result of being firmly planted near the "living" water, producing fruit for others and having leaves that do not wither for the healing of the nations.

There are people who refuse to behave in ways other than being cynical, mocking and self-centered; ways of the "wicked" it says in the Psalm.

Those folks are concerned with immediate gratification and their own desires.

That can't bear fruit!

That doesn't contribute GOOD to the world 'cause there's nothing to give!

As the psalmist wrote: those by-products are like "*chaff blown away by the wind.*"

But prosperous, abundant-fruit-producing people delight in God's law.

Recall that we touched on God's laws and commandments last Sunday; that they aren't meant to be restrictive except to keep the created order God had in mind when God said, "it is good."

Using prosperous trees as a metaphor about WHO we strive to be as prosperous believers, reminds us to keep God's law in their hearts all the time. Now, that doesn't mean sitting with your Bible 24/7...but perhaps speaking, under our breath, the goodness of God's intentions. I say MUTTER AWAY!

Righteous people delight in knowing God better; in living a life that is in the example of Christ. They aren't SELF-righteous, pointing fingers or being too proud of ourselves...instead, we will prosper when we know God's ways of humility, grace, peace, justice and love.

Those are the parts of having a "fruit-bearing" life that makes a positive contribution to the world.

I'd say: It defines an abundant life!

I think that Psalm 1 is both a creation-care text AND one that can nudge us to consider our roots and branches and fruit.

The Bible is about being created for the SOMETHING God has in mind for us to do; the fruit we are to produce. It's about our life and our journey toward righteousness.

Creation blesses us with reminders, (when we're aware of our surroundings) about GOING that direction – toward our righteousness.

One of the multi-syllable words I worked on a lot this summer was **sanctification**.

Sounds intimidating doesn't it?

It's been a long time since most of us have sat in a Confirmation class.

But, *sanctification*, is an important concept for Christians in general and we Methodists in particular.

John Wesley wrote that sanctification was a life-long process.

From the moment of our justification (another big 'un, huh) when we accept that Jesus died to save us from the destruction of sin we are in that process of sanctification; of growing, learning, striving, doing – all parts of sanctification; all part of Creation from the earliest days...in anticipation of Christ's holy work. And it does come to the ultimate harvest!

In Leviticus God called the Israelites to be "holy as I am holy."

In Matthew, Jesus invited the new believers to be "perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."

Sanctification is a consistent theme and calling for, us, the people of God.

It comes from the word "to make holy" or "be separated."

And by separated, I don't mean being withdrawn or pulled apart, but a calling of uniqueness. We are called to be the unique people of God.

To produce apples if that's what kind of tree you're created to be!

And as the hymn goes: "They'll know we are Christians...." (bear with me) by our process of sanctification!

And it isn't just about our individual devotion and love for God.

It means being part of what God is doing in the world as God works for the redemption of the world.

Part of our sanctification, then, is being good stewards of all that God has entrusted into our care as well as nurturing and advocating for the resources of God's creation to benefit our neighbors.

Dr. Sleeth, in his new book, also wrote this: "I've come to understand that one of the most important reasons God chose trees is that at every stage of their lives, trees give."

The way we must take, the way we must live is to do the RIGHT things according to God's teaching.

God's way leads to life...God promised that in John 3:16...eternal life!

Even when we're not aware of it, God is looking out for us and helping us to stay near the water, keep our leaves from withering and to produce abundantly for all of Creation.

Will you pray with me:

Dear God, thank You for showing us Your good way – whether through harvest or TREES!

Bless us as we follow Your ways.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.