

October 14, 2018

St. James Logo "Tree: Cross, Root and Water"

Jeremiah 17:7-8, Acts 13:28-29 (Amplified Bible)

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Today we begin our series on our church logo. Each week we will unpack the symbolism within it and how this applies to our faith and the life of this congregation. We thank Ed Hart for working faithfully with the Consistory as they spoke about the church and then as he put our understanding of faith and ourselves into a church logo.

So today, we begin with the tree, which the Consistory was so sure should be the central piece of our logo. We knew to a degree how the tree symbol is figured in scripture, where trees are numerous, (actually listed 525 times, suggesting 25 different species, only human are mentioned more often). Yet, at the time, we did not know to what degree it is within our own faith tradition, but is also a universal symbol found in the myths and sacred writings of all peoples. So, the tree the central element of our logo not only highlights our faith, but recognizes and shouts a loud "Amen" to our church's mission statement "As an inclusive community of love and support, St. James United Church of Christ is a spiritual home for all people to grow in faith and come together in service."

Trees are the largest and longest lived of all living things, and are used by humanity and living creatures in numerous ways: shade, shelter, protection, for making fire, for fruit and nuts. Desert trees provide drinking water and medicine is made from leaves, stems, and roots.

As a symbol, the tree is therefore rich in meanings, as well as for their practical uses. Also, trees demonstrate the

interconnectedness of leaves and stems and roots, the growth of a tall tree from a tiny seed, and the amazing ability of trees to revive after winter or dry seasons.

Trees appear in the world religions. In Hinduism, the banyan tree is sacred and often worshipped during a morning ritual, in Buddhism, the Buddha/Siddhartha received enlightenment under the bodi tree. In Judaism, Moses received the revealing of God's name in the burning bush. Within Islam, we see the importance of the tree in the pilgrimage of Muhammed. In the Bahai faith, Baha u llah describes himself as the Tree of Life, and refers to female believers as the leaves and male believers as the branches.

Psychologist Carl Jung became fascinated on how often trees showed up in people's dreams and fantasies. In his research he summarized what meaning trees had for people, and later found out that these same meanings regarding trees showed up in scripture, myths, and poetry of which those who had those dreams had no knowledge. Jung concluded that the tree is an archetype: an element of the human collective unconscious – a symbol hard-wired into the brains of peoples of every culture.

The Bible holds in great importance four particular trees: the Tree of Life in the book of Genesis, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the tree upon which Jesus died, and the Tree of Life in the book of Revelation.

The Bible has many different species of trees listed of which I shall give a brief overview of the tree and its place within Jewish-Christian tradition.

- The Tabernacle (the portable place of worship) while wandering in the Wilderness after escaping slavery in

- Egypt was made of acacia wood, and Christ's crown was also made of acacia wood.
- Noah's ark was made of cypress, that vessel which provided salvation for humanity and all living things.
 - Aaron's rod by which he wielded the power of God was made of almond wood.
 - Moses placed twelve branches in the ground the morning after Aaron's rod budded, flowered and had already set fruit of which all the almonds ripened.
 - The cedar of Lebanon, the tallest tree, referred to as mighty king had its timbers used to build Solomon's temple.
 - Fronds of the palm tree were used to greet Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem on what we now know as Palm Sunday. Palm trees were not to be felled when taking a city after a battle or during a time of war, for they were a valuable fruit crop.
 - And then we have the fig tree, the only tree Jesus cursed. How interesting it was the leaves of the fig tree that were used by Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness after they sinned.
 - The frankincense and myrrh given to Jesus at his birth by the Magi originated from trees located in the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. Frankincense being sourced from the resin of the genus *Boswellia* and the myrrh sourced from the resin of the small tree/large shrub *Cammiphora myrrha*.
 - And then we have the olive tree, used for anointing by the high priests, and for intricate carvings in Solomon's temple along with others uses such as lighting oil, as soap, as an ointment for the skin, and as a preservative for wooden shields clad with leather. The olive tree is also seen as a symbol of peace and hope.

- Jesus describes himself as the vine, and says we are the branches.
- And then we have, Jesus being crucified on a tree.

Our tree: our church and each of us are meant to function on two levels. Scripture puts it this way, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as you love yourself. On this, depends all the law and the prophets.”

And thus our hands of our tree are lifted upward in thanksgiving and praise to God as an expression of our love, and our hands reach outward with openness, concern, and support as a sign of our love for our neighbors and the world community.

A tree is only as good as its root system. Scripture in Colossians 2:7 puts it this way, “Keep your roots deep in Christ, build your lives on him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving.”

In [The Hidden Life of Trees](#), Peter Wohlleben shows how trees communicate with each other when danger is near, and how they support each other as they grow by sharing nutrients with those who are sick or struggling, and they create an ecosystem that mitigates the impact of extremes of heat and cold for the whole group. As a result of such interactions, trees in a family or community are protected and can live to be very old. In contrast, solitary trees, like street kids, have a tough time of it and in most cases die much earlier than those in a group.

Pando ([Latin](#) for "I spread out"), is also known as the **Trembling Giant**, a [clonal colony](#) of an individual male [quaking aspen](#) determined to be a single living organism

by identical [genetic markers^{\[3\]}](#) and assumed to have one massive underground [root system](#). The trees roots cover 106 acres and it is estimated to weigh 6,600 tons, making it the [heaviest known organism](#). The root system of Pando, at an estimated 80,000 years old, is among the [oldest known living organisms](#).

Pando is located 1 mile (1.6 km) southwest of [Fish Lake](#) on [Utah State Route 25](#).

Pando is currently thought to be dying. Though the exact reasons are not known, it is thought to be a combination of factors including [drought](#), [grazing](#), and [fire suppression](#). The Western Aspen Alliance, a research group at [Utah State University](#)'s has been studying the tree in an effort to save it, and the [United States Forest Service](#) is currently experimenting with several 5-acre sections of it in an effort to find a means to save it.

This is the current work of the church, to deal with a faith that appears to be dying. And thus, we have open-ended roots on our logo welcoming new ideas from a myriad of sources, even those that are not our own. And like Pando our faith tradition has had far reaching effects and is both broad and deep. This has been our legacy in the sharing of our faith through compassion, mercy, and justice. What will our future hold and release?

Within our logo is water. It is not new information to us, that without water, nothing can survive.

Jeremiah, the prophet, reminds us, "I will bless the person who puts his or her trust in me. He or she will be like a tree

growing near a stream and sending out roots to the water. It is not afraid when hot weather comes, because its leaves stay green; it has no worries when there is no rain; it keeps on bearing fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8 Good News Translation)

“Jesus said, “Those who drink the water I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.’ The woman at the well said, ‘give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again...””
(John 4:14b-15a Good News Translation)

The tree, the cross, the roots, and the water are all a part of who we are, how we see ourselves, and what we are to be and do. For, we are St. James.