

9/23/2018

“Harvest Sunday: Trees & Fruits”

Scripture: Psalm 1; Genesis 1:11; Psalm 52:8; Ezekiel 17:5-6; Revelations 22:2

Series: Season of Creation

This morning we continue our sermon series on Season of Creation. Today, we consider the harvest, in particular of fruit-bearing trees.

When we stay connected to God and draw life from God’s Word, we grow and become 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.”

Psalm 1 (NRSV) says:

Happy (Blessed) 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.

I don’t about you, but when I hear or read these words, I’m not sure at first if I should be glad or worried. After all, who among us is perfect? Haven’t we all at one time or another listened to bad advice and done something we shouldn’t have? I know I have.

And, who among us meditates upon God’s law or word day and night. Does the psalmist mean constantly?

But, then I realize that I have God to thank that He’s always been with me, even when I’ve made mistakes. I am grateful that in and through Jesus Christ my sins have been forgiven. I am not bound to the past. I am free to live in Christ.

I realize how blessed and happy or glad I am that I have the Holy Spirit to guide and protect me. I do delight in God’s word and way, even the commandments, for they lead me in ways of right relationship with God and others, bringing greater peace, satisfaction, and happiness. I do enjoy reading the scriptures and the witness of others, in my morning devotions, and even at night they come to me when reflecting upon the day.

When seen in this light, we can realize that this psalm speaks both of our present life, and also of the one to come. We should read it, not with a self-righteous sense of “better than” or “holier than thou”, but one of joyful humility and gratitude.

Let's take a closer look at the wonderful metaphor the psalmist uses.

In Psalm 1, the psalmist compares a righteous person (that is, one who lives in right relationship with God and others) to a tree, firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season; its leaves do not wither, and in whatever it does, it prospers. This is a recurring set of images that draws us to the importance of the work of God. The description in Psalm 1 is similar to the description of the trees of the restored people of Israel and Judah found in Ezekiel 47:12, and the tree of life, found in Revelation 22:2, following the coming of the New Jerusalem in the end times.

Revelation 22:1-2 says . . .

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

In all three descriptions, we see the following:

1. A tree firmly planted by water
2. A tree that yields fruit
3. Leaves that do not wither
4. A tree that is prospering

† **Firmly planted by water**

The two key components are (1) firmly planted and (2) by water. Both are critical for long-term survival of a tree.

The root system of a tree is key for it obtaining the necessary nutrition, but it is also the structure that anchors the tree solidly to the ground, so that it will not be shaken or “uprooted” when storms come.

Having a steady source of water is integral for long-term survival of trees. The imagery, though, is not just any water source. The source is a river that is life giving. Revelation describes the water as unpolluted, crystal clear. And, Ezekiel offers a good description of this “river of life”: It begins at the temple and flows out toward the Dead Sea. The farther out it goes, the river gets wider and deeper and fiercer. When it opens into the Dead Sea, the sea comes alive with all sorts of living things: fish and the fisherman who come to catch them. Hence, the salty Dead Sea becomes fresh and alive.

When I think of life-giving water, it reminds me of the encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus at Jacob's well (John 4). He offers to each of us, as he did to her, the living water that quenches our thirst for true life.

When we read and meditate upon the scriptures -- the Bible, God's word -- and are firmly

grounded in it, we can use it to refute Satan's lies and temptations, even as Jesus did in the wilderness. When we learn and seek to live by the teachings of Jesus the Christ, the Word of God incarnate, we can follow him and walk in his way that leads to truly living.

† **Yields fruit**

We know that Jesus said a tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:15-20; Luke 6:43-45). He also said that if branches do not produce fruit, they will be cut down and burned to make room for branches that will produce fruit. And, Jesus curses a fig tree for not producing fruit (a judgment on Israel) and then tells a parable about the importance of fruitfulness (Matthew 11).

In all three of these passages and their imagery, the fruit is used to feed others. Fruitfulness, for followers of Jesus, is always for the good of others, as well as oneself. Sometimes, it's food for hungry people. Other times, fruit is companionship for someone lonely or hurting or in prison. Still other times, fruit is a word of hope and good news. There is no shortage of the types of fruitfulness.

The point is that fruitfulness is non-negotiable. An apple tree is known because of its fruit, as is an orange tree and any other type of tree. Trees are known by their fruit. If an apple tree never produces apples, then it is just a tree. Without bearing fruit, followers of Jesus are not fulfilling their purpose and risk being cut down to make room for others who will. This may seem harsh to us, but some of Jesus' teaching are difficult to hear.

† **Leaves that do not wither**

Leaves that do not wither signal something that is eternal, never ending. They are a constant presence throughout time. As the Nelson Study Bible notes, this imagery is likely of a desert date palm tree, which has been firmly planted in a well-watered oasis.

The Ezekiel and Revelation imagery also notes that the leaves serve for healing (of the nations in Revelation). I think of the medicinal leaves of the aloe plant. Although I haven't had to use it in a good while, I keep one on our kitchen window sill.

And, "the imagery of unwilting leaves in the Bible symbolizes the far-reaching impact that Jesus' death and resurrection holds. The effects of sin are overcome. The eternal life offered by God is always available; it will sustain and cure eternally every former sin." (UM Disciples Ministries, 2018)

When you put your trust in God's word and promise of new and everlasting life through Jesus, you can depend on it!

† **Prosper**

Finally, if we are to be righteous in the sight of God, then we will be people who prosper. Prospering is the result of being firmly planted near water, producing fruit and leaves that do not

whither.

There are many ways in which we may prosper. To prosper materially is only one way. And, as we understand from this passage and others, there is no guarantee of financial wealth. We most often find, I believe, that as we live by God's word, God does bless us in many ways. We also find ourselves becoming better stewards of those blessings. The righteous person produces fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is useful for serving God and others as we fulfill God's design and purpose for our lives.

I can only say that in growing up I had my heart and sights on material wealth and ambition. That's not to say they are bad in and of themselves. Part of that was to be able to help others. Yet in becoming more of an intentional follower of Jesus, those values and goals changed. But, I am blessed and happy that I've been able to use some of the gifts and skills that I had pursued and learned earlier to serve God and others. And, although times and circumstances sometimes presented a challenge, God was always there.

Friends, God is with you, too, always! Stay closely connected to Jesus. Draw from the living water of his Word. And, may you continue to grow and prosper in all that you do for his glory!!

As the prophet Jeremiah said (17:7-8) . . .

“. . . blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

And, as the psalmist said . . .

Psalm 52:8

“But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.”

I hope you can say the same. And with all God's people, can say . . . Amen!

+ + +

Questions for Reflection:

What is your favorite kind of tree? Why?

How do you stay connected to God?

What “fruit” do you produce for God's kingdom?

What blessings remain constant as you draw upon your relationship with God?

How have you prospered by staying connected to God, and drawing from God's guidance?