

LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY WATER

A Sermon on Psalm 1

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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; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.

In two locations the Hebrew testament makes use of this tree image. One place is here in the text of Psalm 1. The other is found in Jeremiah 17:7 which says:

⁷Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

I get it. A tree planted by water is a tree that never loses touch with the source of its strength. A tree planted by water is not easily moved from its foundation. A tree planted by water is resilient. It bounces back from assault and challenge. A tree planted by water bears fruit and therefore justifies its existence. I get it. Those who trust in the Lord, they are like trees planted by water. Those who delight in the law of the Lord they are like trees planted by water. Why is it that in the present moment I do not feel much like that strong, resilient, and fruitful tree?

Psalm 1 gives me two choices. Delight in the law of the Lord and be like that tree. Follow the advice of the wicked and be more like chaff – fruitless; blowing in the wind; fit only to be cast aside and burned. I do not remember seeking the advice of the wicked. Yet in this moment of family medical crisis and the uncertainty it imposes

upon our future I find my treeness in question. How deep do my roots go? How solidly am I planted near the source of life giving water? Can one, in a moment of challenge and crisis, even know their own treeness? In those moments when we are aware of our own vulnerability and we are moved to question our own spiritual strength, shall we simply assume that we have somehow given ourselves over to the advice of the wicked? Is it not possible, in a time of drought and stress, that even a tree planted by water might question its own worth and resilience? Once again a seemingly simple assignment of scripture is just what the spirit needs. It seems to me that the complicated truth to which this scripture points is that life is difficult. Our struggle is not over which outside voices we chose, but rather which side of an internal dialogue we might embrace.

A debate rages within each of us. Shall we find our happiness by following our own devices; pursuing our own dreams; asserting our own autonomy? Or shall we give ourselves over completely to God; losing ourselves to God's purpose and thereby, in a great Biblical paradox, gain our lives by losing our lives?

The first choice is fragile. It assumes that life should bend to our will and give us what we want. It tolerates no challenge to our personal agenda. It falls apart when our plans are destroyed by an unwanted diagnosis or anything else that does not fit into our plans. It leads to anger and resentment in our hearts when our aspirations are not achieved.

The second choice leads to strength. It endures through the challenges of life because it does not depend upon achieving our agenda, but depends instead upon our staying connected to God's agenda of love, service and justice. Happiness comes from

knowing that our lives belong to God and that our futures are secured by God. Life may be hard, but God is real and love endures.

Do not despair if both voices can be heard in your heart. It is human nature that we should struggle in this way. Do not despair if in a moment of crisis you might question your spiritual strength. Even Jesus cried out in despair from the cross. Seek the things of God and strength will return.

A few years ago I tried to put these ideas down in a video. I ask your tolerance if you have seen it before. The focus of this day makes showing this again appropriate. I call it, *Like A Tree Planted By Water*.

View video: Like a Tree Planted By Water

THANKS BE TO GOD.

Psalms 1 (NRSV)

¹Happy 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;
²but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
³They 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.
⁴The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Jeremiah 17:7 - 8 (NRSV)

⁷Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
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