

## **Bloom where you are planted**

Easter 7B Psalm 1; John 17:6-19

### **Sermon slide for 10:00AM**

I don't know what my faith life would be like without the psalms. These gems of poetry, wisdom and hymnody from the Bible give us a glimpse of the full human expression of faith, the faith the ancients had or didn't have. Whenever I read them or speak them out loud at a bedside, or a graveside, or wherever, I feel like the ones who wrote them, David or otherwise, understood me. The imagery of the psalms gives us excuses to feel the way we do when we feel that way.

If you are lamenting, there is a psalm for that. If you are joyful, there is a psalm for that. If you are musical, sick, troubled, or uncertain, go to the psalms. If the wicked just need to get theirs, but don't, and the righteous are unhappy, as some are, the psalms are a perfect place to sit with those who were like you are in faith. Sometimes, the whole gamut of feelings can be found in just one of these little gems of wisdom.

Psalm 1 is one of those gems. It's sort of awful and wonderful at the same time. As a kind of preamble of the whole

book of psalms, we are encouraged to live by the law of the Lord and not sit around with all those scoffers; for things don't go so well with the scoffers. For those who are right with God, 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."*

Beautiful stuff; and, yet, it's not so beautiful if you are like the chaff that blows in the wind. I suppose some days I wonder if I'm the chaff.

Without getting mired in the parallelism of this psalm that make us uncomfortable – you know, the righteous walk in the way of the Lord and that makes good things happen while as the unrighteous don't and bad things happen, we still can learn a bit from the underlying purpose of the psalm, which is to be rooted deep. The deeper the roots near water, the easier it is to take a drink in the goodness of God.

While sitting in your chair right now, I wonder if we can practice this. Put your feet solidly on the ground and notice the bottom of your feet. Can you feel

the solid ground beneath your feet? Are your feet tingly or have little feeling. Notice if you can feel the solid, amazing support of the ground beneath you, the pushing down of gravity, the feeling of your shoes or socks, coolness, warmth, just noticing that something is supporting you.

That is kind of what I think feeling rooted to something feels like. Often, we don't think about it in our daily routine, but it's there, supporting us, giving us the weight and resistance we need to get up from a chair, to take a step across the room, and to finally sink into the bed at night. God has given us that rootedness. And, that rootedness the psalmist says is God's word.

But, if you are like me, you don't always feel very rooted to God's word, even if you do open it and allow it to pour into you. We can feel dry, uninterested, detached and confused; that despite our best efforts to be faithful, we still feel like those streams of water, of grace, of love are so far away from us. I'd like to say that that is indeed not only normal, but as the psalms themselves show us, a part of our faithful life.

This is why when I read Psalm 1 in various translations this week, I was so thankful to see something I needed. Hear verse three again from the Common English Version of the Bible:

*"They are like a tree 'replanted' by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade. Whatever they do succeeds."*

REPLANTED. I love that word. Instead of planted, which the NRSV uses, the word "replanted" perked my ears. Other translations use the word transplanted. Maybe these words are better. It's the idea that we are replanted to grow with deep roots that takes the action off of me to make sure the water is there. Instead, someone else is doing the planting and watering.

A tree, or plants can be transplanted, and while as it's not always successful, it is possible for a tree to thrive. Now, if you know me, you know I kind of don't have a green thumb. I have found that I plant things in wrong places, have transplanted plants to find they don't thrive. I'm terrible at remembering to water them properly and don't feed them well. But, I really wanted to plant pollinator flowers this year for

butterflies and bees to thrive in my yard. But, I needed help to do it.

So, I got the advice and help from a local horticulturist – not a landscaper – a horticulturist. She looked at the plot I wanted to fill, recommended the right plants, considered that I didn't want to work too hard to make it come back next year, and we made a plan for that garden. Right now it looks beautiful and I will give you an update because I don't think you will have a choice. My camera will show the results!

But, it got me all entangled in Psalm 1 this week, the garden that needed help in planting to grow. To tend it, I needed to rely upon another. You see, the trick of the faithful life is that we have to be willing to risk ourselves to be transplanted, away from the dry land, the things, the habits, and ways that draw us from the God who longs to give us deep roots and water.

This takes more than that passive, easy, safe faith life. Diving into God's word and living in God's precepts is simply hard. It takes work. It takes desire to do it. And, it takes allowing God in to do the hard work of changing things when they need to be changed.

Just look at the prayer Jesus prays for his disciples in today's Gospel reading. Can you perceive the intensity of Jesus while he prays this last prayer for his disciples? He knows they are about to be planted into a world that will reject them. Of course, they could choose not to go that route, but Jesus knows they will go all in; they will root themselves to his death and resurrection and begin the church.

As joyful as it is to see the resurrected life fully, his disciples will also encounter hardship and death. Jesus prays this prayer asking that those given to him will be protected. Of course, that protection is not a physical protection but rather a spiritual one. Jesus longs to give his disciples a firm footing, one that takes them to the end faithfully.

In a wonderful book called "The Cultivated Life", Susan Collins uses the metaphor of a deeply rooted tree planted by God's word. And, the godly, the blessed life of faith helps us to continue to stand when things get ugly around us. She mentions, as all the psalms do, that the blessed, cultivated life isn't an easy life, or a life in which nothing bad happens. The cultivated life is one in which we are rooted in God, even and

especially in the midst of circumstances beyond our control. She says:

*“Garden imagery draws our attention to variations due to seasons, weather and age, and ultimately the generativity of bearing fruit and enriching the soil. Life in the garden entails the rooted realities of interdependence and intimacy.”*

On my confirmation day, I received my first Bible that wasn't a children's bible from my home congregation at Zion Lutheran Church in Kent, Washington. Puffy stickers were really popular in the 1980's and my youth minister put a puffy sticker on my Bible that is still there to this day that said, "Bloom where you are planted." I think that was a popular phrase back then sort of like the phrase "What would Jesus do" in the early 2000's. But, that phrase means so much more to me now than it ever did when I was 15.

It reminds me that God can plant me and replant me whenever needed. Whenever I end up in a dry, parched land, God can replant me, make things work, and help me to thrive. God longs to do this for all of us, to help us to bloom where we are, wherever we

are. And, God's word is the soil to guide us and give us strength.

Furthermore, Jesus prays this for us just as he did for his dear friends before his death. He does not leave us orphaned even though we may often wonder. This rooted life is abundantly offered as Psalm 1 declares:

*“They are like a tree replanted by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade.”*

Amen.