

Rev. Curran Reichert
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“The Wisdom of trees?”

Isaiah 41:19-20

“I will put the cedar in the wilderness,
The acacia and the myrtle and the olive tree;
I will place the juniper in the desert
Together with the box tree and the cypress,
That they may see and recognize,
And consider and gain insight as well,
That the hand of the Lord has done this,
And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Trees are a wonder, next to the mention of people and God, scholars have found that trees feature more heavily in the bible than any other subject.

I can think of very important biblical stories about fig, apple, olive, and almond trees, cedar and cypress trees galore. There are also stories about date palms, henna, pistachio, poplar, and pomegranate trees to name a few.

The tree of knowledge is used to form the basis of our creation stories in Genesis, the trees of Jerusalem and the rivers that flowed around them were the point of departure for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Noah’s arc, the stable, the cradle, the cross were all made from particular trees. To honor the evergreen presence of Christ in our lives we place Christmas trees in our living rooms each year. Trees are a very important part of our lives- in fact we wouldn’t be alive without them, but what can they teach us about God, what can God teach us about ourselves through trees?

Ask a person to consider a special tree from their childhood and there is not a one among us who cannot recall a walnut, redwood, eucalyptus, or oak that served as a fort or meeting place, our refugee, swing, shade, or target practice. Perhaps it was the place we carved the initials of our first love or buried the remains of our beloved pet.

Like God, trees a constant, they are everywhere, day and night, night and day, resilient, interdependent, regenerative, a source of comfort and of

strength, they warm us, they inspire us and they help return us to ourselves.

Genesis 1:12

The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

Our God is a generous God, a greening God- trees are beautiful reminders of God's presence among us.

How might we learn more about who God means for us to be through trees? Follow me through a little tree free association:

Ezekiel 17:5-6

God also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil, placed it beside abundant waters; and set it like a willow. Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward God, but its roots remained under it. So, it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches.

Isaiah 44:4

God envisions that we
will spring up among the grass
Like poplars by streams of water.'

We are to be:

Psalms 52:8

like a green olive tree in the house of God;
trusting in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.

Micah 4:4

God's vision for God's people is that we will
sit under God's vine
And under God's fig tree,
And out of the peace that comes from within we will make no one afraid,
For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

On this Labor Day weekend- a time when many of us would be getting in one last road trip or camping adventure, I invite you to spend some time considering the trees.

There was great rejoicing recently when firefighters were able to save the Great Mother tree in Big Basin. When was the last time you hiked to the Grandmother tree right here in Jack London park. If that is too far a piece for you to consider then find a tree closer by and make a date to spend some time, have a picnic, watch the leaves as they begin to march toward fall. Feel God's presence there with you, here with us- in the bark, in the roots and in the branches reaching up toward the light.

You may have a favorite tree poem, I have several but this one I like the best;

The Sycamore Wendell Barry's

In the place that is my own place, whose earth
I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,
a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.
Fences have been tied to it, nails driven into it,
hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.
There is no year it has flourished in
that has not harmed it.

There is a hollow in it that is its death, though its living brims whitely
at the lip of the darkness and flows outward.
Over all its scars has come the seamless white
of the bark. It bears the gnarls of its history
healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection
in the warp and bending of its long growth.
It has gathered all accidents into its purpose.
It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.
It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.
In all the country there is no other like it.
I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.
I see that it stands in its place and feeds upon it,
and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.

And finally, these words from Proverbs, let them serve as our guide as we move into another week of unrest, remembering that a hundred years to us are but a blink in the mind's eye of a tree...

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,

And he who is wise wins souls.

Amen