

***16 Dec 2020 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Midweek in Advent  
Jesus, The Life of Jesse's Tree***

Lord, we thank you for the gift of your Word and as we think on these Scriptures, open our hearts and our minds to hear you. Amen

In the past two mid-week services, we focused on the SEED of Jesse's Tree, promised to Adam and Eve after the Fall and the ROOT of that tree, God's choosing a people for himself, the offspring of Abraham, the Hebrews.

For this third midweek service, we focus on LIFE of Jesse's Tree, the fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah (11:1-2), which begins:

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,*

*and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*

*And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,*

*the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,*

*the Spirit of counsel and might,*

*the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord*

And concludes (11:10)

*In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for*

*the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting*

*place shall be glorious*

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The Holy Spirit often uses agricultural references to convey biblical truths in a manner that is easy to understand, since most of us, even those of us living in this information era, have a basic knowledge of flowers, grass, vines, bushes, and trees.

I've got a black thumb, but even I can tell you that plants primarily grow from either seeds or cuttings. However, that's not how most of us become part of Jesse's Tree. We're not natural-born heirs of Abraham but have been grafted into that family tree by adoption. Just as at Jesus's baptism, God the Father acknowledged Jesus' divine sonship, at our baptism, God acknowledged us as His adopted sons and daughters.

The fourth commandment tells us to honor our parents as children and we are called to be obedient our earthly fathers. In today's text, Jesus tells John that *"they must carry out all that God requires"* and Paul, in his letter to the Philippians (2:8), says:

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*And being found in human form, he [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Do we have that level of obedience? I know I don't, despite wanting to and trying to, I fall far short of the mark each and every day, and I imagine you do to. But we find comfort in knowing that we are baptized, that God has grafted us into Jesse's tree and that our sins are covered by the shed blood of Christ, who was put to death on a tree.

So, what else do we know from nature and scripture about trees?

*They Grow*

Most of us would agree that to grow and flourish, plants need things like good soil, nutrients, air, water, and sunshine.

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We likewise need such things to grow and mature spiritually. Our **soil** is the community of fellow believers, this local congregation, where we can develop that strong root structure necessary to both support growth and mitigate damage when the storms of life arise. This Κοινωνία (koy-nohn-ee'-ah) or fellowship is not optional, it is essential. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: (10:24-25)

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

And what are those **nutrients?** God's Word and Sacraments! We collectively are fed by Bible Studies, the lessons that are read, the hymns that are sung, the sermons that are preached, and the supper that is eaten.

While I don't want to push the analogy too far, we might say that the indwelling Holy Spirit is our **air,** and that Christ is our Living **Water.**

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In short, God provides ALL resources that we need to grow into spiritual maturity; all we need to do is to avail ourselves of these gifts.

*They Bear Fruit*

The trees and vines of scripture are typically fruit or nut bearing trees – figs, dates, grapes, olives, almond, and such. The fruits of these trees are evident, but what about our fruits?

They may be obvious – like those that enhance our worship service - instrumentalists, vocalists, and directors – or the evangelist – who tell others about the Christ child and see their eyes opened to God's eternal truth. Other may be less public, like those who prepare the sanctuary for the seasons and the altar for the sacrament or choose the hymns that we sing. In some cases, the fruit may be children and grandchildren who have a vibrant relationship with the Lord, or the spiritual, emotional, and physical support of one's spouse. Or it could be doing our jobs with excellence and humility, whatever they may be, so that we are the light shining in the darkness, standing out from the rest of the work world.

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To summarize, just like an apple tree produces apples and a grape vine grows grapes, we have various vocations into which God has placed us and our good fruit is whatever is natural and normal for each of those vocations.

*How are we to do it?*

In our hallway at home, there is a drawing illustrating John 15:4-8,

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches.*

*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

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Without the soil of the congregation and the nutrients of Word and Sacrament, we can do nothing.

*They Get Pruned*

This is not to say that life is always easy. You may have noticed that the trees in the parking lots were recently pruned. This too, can be applied to our growth in Christ. Again, John in his Gospel (15:2) quotes Jesus saying:

*Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away,  
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may  
bear more fruit.*

The trials and tribulations that we face in our daily lives are NOT punishment but are often the act of pruning by a loving God so that we can become all that He has created us to be.

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*They Are Cut Down if they Don't Produce Fruit*

Finally, scripture does contain a warning – those trees that don't produce fruit, because they reject the free gifts of God or separate themselves from the vine of Christ, are cut down and thrown into the fire, not unlike the already dead Christmas trees that we put up in our homes and then discard soon after the 25<sup>th</sup>.

When we think about such a horrible fate – to be cut off from God for ever and ever, we should find comfort in the knowledge that don't have to wonder if we are good enough, if we really have made Him our Lord, or anything else, because He has made us His Children. it's all God's doing; He chose us before the foundation of the world, called us by the Gospel, and sanctifies us through Word and Sacrament to life everlasting.

It is my prayer for all of us during the Advent season that we will earnestly seek the presents, or gifts, that God has so richly provided to us and for us, so that during this time we might bear abundant fruit and bring glory to His name and to His church. AMEN.