



Sermons from
First Presbyterian Church

“Three Trees”

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April 22, 2012

Third Sunday of Easter

Psalm 62

Revelation 22:1-5

Today I’ve entitled my sermon “Three Trees.” There are many great children’s books on trees, including “The Tale of the Three Trees,” “There Once Was a Tree,” and Shel Silverstein’s classic, “The Giving Tree.” Then there is the young adult classic, “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.” And there are many more. What is so fascinating and wonderful about trees? What is it that draws us to them, that gives us a sense of peace and calm? What is so **trusting** about trees? On this Earth Day in 2012, I invite you to spend some time among the trees.

First Tree: Garden of Eden

In the beginning.... There was forest. Imagine yourself there. Dark, deep fertile soil beneath one's feet. Bright, radiant limbs and leaves above one's head, shimmering and rustling in the gentle wind: a family of trees.

There were many trees in the Garden of Eden, and yet two trees stood out in particular: The tree of life, and the tree of knowledge. All of the trees were to bear fruit and sustenance, but one was forbidden: the tree of knowledge. Now, there are many interpretations to this story, and I would like to simply focus on one for today. I’m meditating on the tree of knowledge of love. We like to think of love as purely good and wonderful and beautiful, and I suppose true love is – it certainly casts out all fear and covers a multitude of sins. Yet love is not without its risk – its risk of trust and betrayal, its risk of connection and rejection, its risk of yearning and spurning. I wonder if eating from the tree of knowledge opened their eyes – our eyes – to the mountains and valleys of love and relationship. Dare they walk on? Dare we? They must, for they cannot stay, and neither can we.

I can hear God singing these words being sung to us from the song, “Sigh No More” by Mumford & Sons:

*Love; it will not betray you
Dismay or enslave you, it will set you free
Be more like the man you were made to be*

*There is a design, an alignment to cry
Of my heart to see,
The beauty of love as it was made to be*

Do our hearts truly see the beauty of love as it was made to be? Or has darkness closed in all around us? Has fear overtaken us, and made our hearts afraid to love?

Using the words of Ann Frank, “I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness. I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come out right.”

So let us look to the heavens to the New Jerusalem pictured in Revelation

Second Tree: A New Jerusalem

In the end... there is a city. And in the middle of this city is a tree, spanning the river of life.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

The tree of life from Genesis reappears in the last chapter of Revelation. It spans the river of life and bears fruit continually for all peoples, represented by the twelve kinds of fruit in all twelve months of the year. All are welcome here. It is a beautiful vision, one worthy of inspiration – a hope to hold onto. Again, from Mumford & Sons:

*And there will come a time, you'll see, with no more tears.
And love will not break your heart, but dismiss your fears.
Get over your hill and see what you find there,
With grace in your heart and flowers in your hair.*

It's a beautiful vision, something to aspire to and hope for - but we are not there yet, not yet. We are not there as long as we are cutting down the trees of life in an unsustainable manner. We are not there as long as we are using our oceans as a trash bin for all of our waste. We are not there as long as we are polluting our rivers and air with the byproducts of chemicals and pesticides. We are not there as long as we are leaving nothing for our children or our children's children.

Third Tree: The Cross of Christ

In the middle.... At the center... Of time and space... Stands the tree of life and death.

For those who say there is nothing for you here, only death,
Jesus says, there is still hope!

For those who say there is nothing for you here, only destruction,
Jesus says, behold, a new creation!

So,

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes speaks of a dream exploding. And here at the cross, there is an explosion of love into the world. We've spoken of three trees, but we all share one destiny: new life.

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress. . . my **forest**; I shall never be shaken.

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