



Lent 2022



TREES OF LIFE

Lent 2022



WEEK 1

WEDNESDAY

The Trees in the Garden

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-18

One of the most famous trees has to be in the Garden of Eden. Can you picture it? A place overflowing with life, perfection, and God's presence. "The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2:9 NLT) The Garden of Eden and the trees there remind me of God's perfect plan for all of humanity. Even though there was evil lurking in the garden, waiting to make a move, God was already planning our redemption through Jesus. These trees remind me of how God loves us and knows us and wants such good things for us. In Genesis 2:15, it says, "The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden." Are there times in your life where you know that God has placed you in a specific spot for a reason? Ask God to show you what His purpose is for you in this season of your life.

God is also our provider. In Genesis 2:18, God provided man a helper. Can you think of the ways God has provided for you in the past? In Genesis 2:16-17, God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die." Even when God provides us with a plan, purpose, resources, and the right people around us, we are also reminded from this scripture to be on guard—lies and temptation are out there to get us off track. Spend some time reflecting on who God is, how He loves you, His good plans for you, and stay on guard against things that try to distract you from Him.

Calli Hanson

SUNDAY

We Need Trees

1 Chronicles 16:33

"Let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth."

I used to LOVE climbing trees. For me, a good climbing tree is a symbol of childhood. As I sat in the tree, I was always amazed at how the entire tree started as a tiny seed – and that one tree could produce thousands of seeds, which could lead to thousands of trees. In that tree, I was amazed at God's creation, could see the world from a better vantage point, and felt confident, safe, and invincible. For others, that feeling may be represented by a tree house, or a tire swing tied to an oak tree's branch.

The breath of that tree provides the oxygen we need to breathe. Our carbon dioxide, in turn, feeds the tree. God was wise when he created that connection – both need each other in order to thrive.

Trees have been used by people for millennia for many reasons. Be it shade and shelter, tool making, or keeping warm by the fire. As we have developed as a people, our understanding of wood and its uses has improved. From simple shelters, we have developed houses, bridges, and skyscrapers. Even Jesus worked as a carpenter. From the resource God has provided, humans have learned to make amazing things.

Despite the amazing things we have been able to do with trees, the strongest connection many of us get from trees is spiritual. As we work our way through the Bible, trees mark major moments, from Genesis, with references to the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, through the gospels, where Jesus was nailed to "the tree," and finally to Revelation, where we are re-united with the Tree of Life to sustain us in eternity. The tree is a gift from God to sustain and protect us.

Maybe that is why trees have permeated our spiritual culture as much as they have. We celebrate with our families around the Christmas Tree. We talk about our past and future when looking at our Family Tree. We bury our pets under the tree in the back yard, and place benches in memory of lost loved ones under trees at the park.

As I have gotten older, my relationship with the trees has changed, but I have always had admiration for the beauty, complexity, individuality, and sturdiness of the trees. I may not be able to climb a tree as well as I used to, but I really do enjoy taking a photo of a perfect tree in front of a beautiful sunset.

If you have felt disconnected from God, try to find a tree – to climb, to photograph, or just to admire. How you connect with nature is not the important part, but being present with his creation is our reminder that we will be with the ultimate life-sustaining tree again someday. Maybe that is why I felt so calm as a child in a tree, even when my mother seemed to be WAY more nervous...

Aaron Van Ningen

Lent 2022



WEEK 2

WEDNESDAY

The Gopher Tree & Olive Branch

Genesis 6:5, Noah's Story

In the days of Noah, we read about how evil humankind had become. In the beginning of Genesis 6, it is quite clear that it broke God's heart and God was not pleased. "But Noah found favor with the Lord." (Genesis 6:8 NLT) Can you imagine being Noah and getting those specific instructions to build the ark, collect food and supplies for your family, and have animals in pairs of every kind coming your way? It must have been very difficult amongst the other people of the day to be the only one doing this. "So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him." (Genesis 6:22). Noah was listening for God's instructions, and he acted on them. God asked Noah to build the boat of gopher wood. In the wood of the ark, we are reminded of obeying the LORD even if we're the only one. Is there something God is asking you to do?

The story of Noah and the flood is so familiar. Genesis tells us the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days. "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the boat...and the floodwaters began to recede." (Genesis 8:1) and "exactly after 5 months from the time the flood began, the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat." (Genesis 8:4) Even though the floodwaters were receding, they still weren't able to get off the boat. What a family road trip experience!! After a few attempts of sending birds out to see if there was land, finally a dove returned to Noah with a fresh olive leaf or branch as a sign that the floodwaters were almost gone. After all they had experienced, I have to imagine that olive branch was such a great sign of hope for them. God sends us "olive branches" of hope too. Can you see them? Try to look for signs of hope that God is trying to show you this week.

Calli Hanson

SUNDAY

Hope in New Life

Job 14:7 NIV

At least there is hope for a tree:

*If it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its new shoots will not fail.*

We don't know if Job was referring to a specific type of tree in this passage, but I like to think about the olive tree. In the Middle East, the geographical context for the Bible, the fact that olive trees grow back from the roots is well known. Recent studies of olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, in Jerusalem, have established that the roots are at least 900 years old!

In 1998, I had the privilege of touring Israel with a small group. One of our stops was at the Lebanese border, along the security buffer zone. Our tour leader pointed out the new shoots of an olive tree that had been hit by a katyusha rocket during the height of the Israeli-Lebanese conflict in the 1980's. The tree had been destroyed and the stump had been charred by flames. Even so, new shoots had been growing from the roots! Watching those shoots grow over the years had filled our tour leader with great hope.

Have you, like Job, been devastated by events in your life? Have you felt hopeless? I have. On more than one occasion. Yep, pain and loss easily cloud our perspective. But, when we read the end of Job's story, we find that he was eventually healed and restored. Was the damage undone? No. However, we do find Job thriving again. We find that his life was actually like the tree he spoke about.

And like the damaged and charred olive tree with tall growing shoots, I believe we also can recover from the various devastations of life. We just have to wait upon God's grace and power to work in our lives. How long will it take before new shoots can spring forth in our lives? Only God knows. But we must hold onto the hope that we will once again grow, and even flourish. This is the lesson of the Tree of Hope.

Kristine Leinart

Lent 2022



WEEK 3

WEDNESDAY

Trees of Hospitality

Genesis 18:1-5a

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way..."

What do trees teach us about the nature of God and His love for us? After contemplating the Tree of Hospitality for quite some time, one word comes to the forefront. Invitation.

In Genesis, chapters 13-18, we read about the great trees of Mamre. This grove of trees marked the dwelling area of a tribe of Amorites who showed great hospitality to Abraham.

In the ancient world, hospitality meant "graciously receiving an alienated person into one's land, home, or community and providing directly for that person's needs".* Abraham and his entourage were foreigners, temporarily living in that region. The Amorites invited them in. Here Abraham made allies with the Amorites and was allowed to pitch his tent and to build an altar to worship the God who had invited him to leave Ur to come to the promised land.

Later, under these same trees, Abraham was quick to invite three strangers to rest and freshen up their dusty feet. He invited them to eat. He invited them into conversation. He provided graciously and generously for his guests. And in so doing, Abraham entertained angels unaware. He had an encounter with the Lord God Almighty, who then gave Abraham a special promise as well as an invitation to intercede on behalf of others. (You can read this in the rest of chapter 18.)

Hospitality is an invitation to come together. God has invited us into His kingdom. He has graciously offered to provide for our needs. And God has invited us to follow His example.

**Quote from: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/hospitality/>*

Kristine Leinart

SUNDAY

The Reluctant Prophet

Proverbs 13:22 MSG

A good life gets passed on to the grandchildren.

All around us we view God's creativity at work. In plants and trees there is much happening that we cannot see. For example, the rings inside a tree show its age and growth. Evident in the rings is history of abundant moisture and years of drought. But through it all the tree continues to grow and add more rings.

It's the same with us. No matter what the tree has had to endure, the new growth – new rings – build on the old growth. Who we are today is a product of the good and the bad we have endured. But we need not keep those lessons hidden, like the rings of a tree. Let those coming after us see us persevere. Let them hear us sing praises to God when life is abundant. Let them know that whatever comes our way, we move on with faith and hope that God will see us through. Our children can build on that. Those following them will observe the same ability to offer praise, faith and hope in all circumstances.

Cheryl Sailer

Lent 2022



WEEK 4

WEDNESDAY

A Wooden Ladder to Heaven

Genesis 28:10-17

I've spent a few nights on church floors throughout the years, chaperoning youth events. I never sleep well on those nights. I love student ministry; but I also really love my comfy bed. When I read in Genesis 28:11 that Jacob took a stone and used it as a pillow while sleeping on the ground, I can already feel the back-ache growing. Unlike me, Jacob managed to fall into a deep enough sleep to dream a prophetic dream.

Jacob sees a ladder stretching between the earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. God speaks to Jacob and reiterates the covenant already given to his father and grandfather.

When Jacob awakes, he says "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it...How awesome is this place!" (Gen 28:16-17) I can relate to that! Sometimes it's precisely when I'm uncomfortable, over-tired and annoyed, that I'm most surprised by God's presence. What a delight to find God at work all around me, even despite my discomfort.

God continued to be faithful to Abrahams family, passing the promise of blessings down to his grandson Jacob. Even though we see how Jacob is a trickster and thief in the rest of his stories; God remained ever faithful.

Whether you find yourself in a comfy bed season, or stone pillow season, lift your eyes to the top of the ladder – you will see that our faithful God is in this place too and will continue to be with you.

Vicky Vetter

SUNDAY

The Messiah Tree

Isaiah 11:1

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

Isaiah 53:2-3

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

When I see these verses, I think of the old tree in our back yard. We thought it was dead, so we cut it down – only the stump remained. For a few years, only the stump remained. But all of a sudden, one year, a shoot started to grow out of the stump. Where there seemed to be nothing but an appearance of death, behold – LIFE!

This dead stump that came to life is just like these verses describe in Isaiah. In previous chapters, there is a description where there is a cutting down of all the majestic trees (people) of Israel; but God left a stump. A stump that one day would become a tree... what once was cut down, later from the line of David – A Savior – Jesus!

What seemed to have an appearance of nothing... what seemed to have no worth came the most amazing, most worthy, tree of life – JESUS!

Prayer: Lord when you came, it seemed to be a season of Israel's history when nothing remained, no hope, all was cut down or lost. But you came to rewrite the story. You were not adorned with splendor, nor did you look beautiful so that we would be attracted to you. Instead, we despised and rejected you. We treated you as the dead stump thinking that you were of no worth... but little did we know that you would be our Savior. When we thought you were dead – you were not, you came back to life. Lord, help us to have eyes to see you as the Tree of Life that we have available to us. Help us to not look at the outward appearances, but let us see situations through your eyes, and the eyes of eternity. We love you Lord. Amen.

Jen Einrem

Lent 2022



WEEK 5

WEDNESDAY

The Tree of Forgiveness

Stories of Joseph, Genesis 45

Forgiveness is easy for some, but others find it impossible. In Genesis, Joseph found forgiveness through his faith in the Lord. By his faith and forgiveness, Joseph saved his people from a severe famine. My sister, Patty says "Forgiveness is Life!" That is exactly what I experienced when God opened my heart to forgive.

In 2010, my heart was deeply hurt. I choose to shut myself off from family, friends and faith by building a brick wall around my heart. The Holy Spirit had other plans and called me to Legacy. Shortly after my husband and I joined the church, I had an unforgettable encounter with the Holy Spirit during a service. There I receive grace and forgiveness that changed my heart and that protective wall began to crumble. I began anew on the journey to deepen my faith and joined the prayer warrior team. During an Advent fast, I felt the call to forgive those who had hurt me. I knew my journey could not progress until I was open to change. So I wrote notes of forgiveness to those who had hurt me, knowing that they would probably not respond. But I trusted in the Lord and dropped the notes in the mailbox. Immediately I was filled with an indescribable joy and the walls around my heart fell like the walls of Jericho! My life was restored through forgiveness.

Who do you need to forgive today? Family? Friends? Yourself? Forgiveness may be hard, but it is worth the new life you receive through the Holy Spirit!

Rita Lepp

SUNDAY

Christ, the True Vine

John 15:1-2

A few years ago, I transplanted some mature grape vines. I remember the first season I got a lot of growth on the vines... but no fruit. I then remembered John 15:1-2 (The Bible is even good for practical applications).

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:1-2 NIV

I looked up pruning grapes and was shocked as I timidly cut almost all of the new vines, and left a stick. That summer I was amazed; there was fruit! In addition, a lot of new vines, which again had to be pruned.

Now this is a yearly thing. In the Fall, I mark the very fruitful branches, and cut everything else off. Each year - more fruit, more vines.

Sometimes there are vines that grow off of other vines (not the original vine). None of these produce fruit. Instead, they just suck all the nutrients that is needed for the fruit.

This is a true reflection of what we need to be in our daily walk with the Lord. As Christians we are to produce fruit, not just be 'viney'.

We cannot go off of someone else's faith to produce fruit. We each need to be directly connected to the true vine - Jesus. When we are connected to the main vine (Jesus) we get the nutrients we need to be able to produce fruit.

So how do we get these nutrients? How do we stay connected?

- Through studying God's Word, this helps us to hear what the Lord is saying.
- Through Prayer, which is a conversation with you and God, where you speak and listen (and then obey).
- Through Worship, where you acknowledge who God is... It may be through singing, but it also other means like admiring God's creation and standing in awe of its beauty and intricacies.

So trust this Gardner, stay connected to the vine (Jesus), and allow him to prune you when needed, so you produce fruit.

Jen Einrem

Lent 2022



WEEK 6

WEDNESDAY

The Burning Bush

Exodus 3:2-5

When we teach tellers at the bank how to identify counterfeit currency, we don't first have them look at counterfeit bills and see if they can tell if it's fake or not. We have them study a legitimate bill and identify all the characteristics that are present. Once they know what it should look like, counterfeit bills are much easier to spot. In today's verses, Moses spotted something different and stopped to take a closer look. A bush was on fire, but wasn't burning up! God wanted to get Moses' attention to speak about rescuing His people from Egypt.

It would be nice if God would be this direct when He wanted to talk to us, but I do think God has similar ways of speaking to us. We all have an idea of what is "normal" so to speak. When I see my coworkers, they smile and wave. When I'm driving around, other cars are heading to their destinations. When my youngest daughter comes home, I get a big hug. These are all "normal" for me. When we come across instances where things are more unusual, how do we respond? If I don't get a hug from my daughter, I know something's wrong. That's an easy one for me to identify and do what I can to help her. But it's a little harder for me to ask a coworker if everything's alright when I don't get that smile or wave. Or to stop and help when I see a vehicle pulled over on the road. These diversions from our "normal" that are around us everyday may be little burning bushes trying to get our attention. They're not miraculous signs, but if we stop to notice these differences and do something to help, we may be the miracle that others need.

Jeremy Skoglund

SUNDAY

Christ and the Cross

1 Peter 2:24

From a tree came the wooden cross where Jesus was crucified. We sometimes lose focus on how personal this brutal, violent act is to each and every one of us who have chosen to follow Jesus. We continue to let sin, that Jesus gave his life to save us from, creep into our thoughts and affect our feelings and actions towards ourselves and others. To do this minimizes our acceptance of the unfathomable, great love that God has for us. Christ bore the punishment that our sins, past, present, and future, deserve. He died on the cross in our place to free us of the penalty of death resulting from sin. Because of this, we are able, and we must, release the power of guilt, shame, and regret caused by sin so we can fully experience the grace and mercy and great love of our Lord Jesus Christ. But let's not keep that grace and mercy and love to ourselves. We are to extend and pour out what we've received to others that are put in our paths. Some time ago, I heard it stated, "You will never look into the eyes of someone God doesn't love - always be kind."

Jesus, I will forgive, love and show acceptance because of what I've received from your unconditional love for me.

Bonnie Taylor

Lent 2022



WEEK 7

WEDNESDAY

Christ, The Tree of Life

Galatians 5:19-23

When I was a child, our elementary school participated in an Arbor Day celebration. A tree was given to each student with the hope that they would be planted, put down roots and bring new life—a promise of what is to come. My brother and I proudly showed the small twigs to our dad. He smiled and helped us choose a place that would become a home for our trees. We planted them with great excitement. Before long the trees were forgotten. They were watered by the rains and snow. Just recently, I remembered the trees. I wanted to see if they were still alive. To my surprise, some 35 years later, they had grown from spindly sticks to strong, magnificent trees almost forty feet tall!

Our faith is much like these trees. As we begin our faith journey with Jesus Christ, we may feel like tiny saplings in a world of mighty oaks—those who have gone before us, examples of strong faith. What does our weak beginning contribute to the body of Christ and to our worlds? But as we grow in our faith, our trees, lives planted in faith, will put down roots, mature, and become strong. And our trees of faith, unlike my forgotten tree, when taken care of and watered, will bear fruit. Fruit that will last!

Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

Becca Hafner