

## Seventh Sunday after Easter & Sunday after the Ascension “The Living Trees of God”

Acts 1:45-17; Ps 1; 1 Jn 5:9-13; Jn 17:6-19

Today, I want to focus on our Psalm, Psalm One; the first Psalm in the entire collection of Psalms. “Happy in God is the one who delights in the LORD.” Happiness is such a fleeting emotion—Here Today, Gone Tomorrow. We live in a society that bases happiness on so many things—usually outward things like possessions—it is a cruel trick that the world plays on so many of us—that if we just have the right car, the right home, or the newest gadget that we will somehow be happier people.

Likewise, if we just look or dress a certain way or have a certain body type, that somehow, we will be happier. Or, perhaps, if we just have the “right relationship,” our perfect match is out there....and *e-harmony* will help! Yet, if we did have everything—everything that we could name or want or think that we want—would it really fulfill our lives? Would we know a contentment, know such a feeling of peace that staggers human thought or emotion? No, because enjoying ourselves is not the same as: enjoying God! Our Psalmist understood that true “fulfillment” comes when we are **God**-centered and not **self**-centered.

True satisfaction involves not finding fulfillment or enjoyment in ourselves, but finding satisfaction, fulfillment, and delight in God. Despite contrary opinions, the goal of our Christian lives is not to please “ourselves”—but to **enjoy God**! Before the days of COVID, many of us used to go out to eat, go out to the movies or to concerts. And we might say afterwards: “I had a good time.” But the nicer thing to say would be: “I really enjoyed being with you.”

The first statement (about having a “good time”) is about how we feel. But the second statement (about enjoying someone’s presence) is about the person we are with. It’s the same in our relationship with God—our focus can be on ourselves or it can be on God. Psalm 1 reminds us that the goal of a real Christian is **not** to enjoy oneself, but to enjoy God.

And why is that? Well, because God created us—God created you and me. God wants us to be satisfied. God wants us to be full. We may talk about “being filled with God,” but do we actually *allow* God to: “*fill us?*”

Our Psalmist says that a person devoted to the Lord *meditates* on God and on God’s Word “*day and night.*” In other words, God fills their existence. Unfortunately, without a God-centered focus; we can become obsessed with the faults and shortcomings of ourselves and of others. However, when we focus solely on God, then God becomes the source of our strength, our hope, and our assurance. And when that happens, the Psalmist says that we become like “trees.” God-centered people are like trees, trees planted by living water.

Interestingly, in this Psalm, we are not compared to a “flower” or to “grass ....*that is here today and gone tomorrow.*” [i.e., Ps 103; Isa 40:7-8] Instead, when we spend our life for God—we become like trees; like lush trees planted by a stream that flows continually from the throne of God. When we are trees

nourished by God, we become trees anchored with a deep root system, finding the abundant nourishment that we need.

Jesus himself said in John 4:14: “*but those who drink of the water that I shall give will never thirst. (For) the water that I shall give, will become **in** them a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*” A tree’s deep roots help ensure that it will not topple over, even when storms come. When we are grounded in the Lord, we are not easily uprooted because we know our security rests in Christ Jesus.

Many of you have had enormous struggles in your lives; perhaps some of you are going through them now. The one sure hope that we have is that “*the LORD is our rock and our fortress, our deliverer. He is our strength in whom we place our trust.*” [i.e., Pss 8; 62] And though storms may rage about us, as God-centered people, we are planted by a stream of *living* water and we shall not be moved.

And oh, what a beautiful sight: a tree or trees standing along a river bank, with branches reaching upward. It is something an artist longs to paint. A beautiful tree makes us stop and not just say, “Oh, that’s pretty,” but it makes us appreciate the one who created it! Likewise, our lives, as we live them fully for God, should cause others to be drawn not to *us*, but to behold the God *in* us; to say, “How great is God!”

Of course, that leads to the fact that trees, as we mentioned last week, produce something. The purpose of a tree is that there will be more trees like it in years to come; just as the trees mentioned today’s psalm yield fruit. Hear verse 3 once more: “*They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.*” A righteous and God-centered person who puts God first and lives that way will, by their very nature, produce something....something that can be offered to the world to bring nourishment and life.

More than anything, I hope today’s sermon will help you realize who you are in Christ Jesus. As the Church, we are not weak or powerless. We are mighty and strong. We are not easily broken, because *we* have our roots deeply planted in the life-giving soil of God’s Word, “*in whom we live and move and have our very being.*” (Acts 17:28) Christ Jesus nourishes us with a life-giving stream that never runs dry. We flourish, we grow, we produce—not because of who *we* are—but because of who He is in us.

We live to “glorify and enjoy God,” for we are the “*living trees*”.... planted in the living water of eternal life that flows from the very heart of God. So remember, even if only for an hour, *you* are a beautiful “tree.” A tree rooted in and fed by the living God. So enjoy God....glorify God, for it is God and God alone who gives you life and true fulfillment.

***“They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
...everything they do will prosper.” Ps 1:3a,c***