

Pentecost – 2023
Numbers 11:24-30
Acts 2:1-21
John 7:37-39

A bad tree doesn't produce good fruit. I have confessed to you before that I am not a horticulturist. It's true. I'm way better at killing things than I am at growing things. But I'm a gamer; which is to say that I'm always buying the next plant, sowing new seed, dreaming the next Kensington-Palace-Garden-Dream for our humble home on Campus Ave. I had a peach tree once. It developed curling leaf. Not that I particularly like peaches, I don't, but I wanted to keep the tree. I had to treat the source of the problem, whatever was engendering this curling leaf issue. Here are just some of the causes of curling leaf: Pests, overwatering, viral infection, too much light, too much heat, chemical damage from herbicides, or nitrogen deficiency. This was some years ago but I'm pretty sure that I sprayed it with something or other and it promptly died.

A bad tree doesn't produce good fruit. Does your sinful nature produce Christ-like fruit? Does your sinful nature love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself? Does your sinful nature readily put others above yourself, does it readily forgive the sins of others, does it readily serve those who don't serve you? Or, does your sinful nature rather keep a very detailed record of wrongs. Does your sinful nature burden others with standards that you don't have any intention of keeping yourself? Does your sinful nature tell you that humility is for suckers? A bad tree does not produce good fruit. And it's useless trying to *force* the bad tree to produce good fruit. The tree itself has to be transformed. Listen to this from the book of Romans: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2 NIV). Be transformed; what God demands, God provides.

How many of y'all believe that you have been transformed? Christianity states unequivocally that sinful men and women *are* transformed (Colossians 3:10; Titus 3:5). It's sweet, isn't it, this new life that God has given us? It *is* sweet. It is Christ's life, a new and holy life, a joyous and purposeful and rich life, deeply satisfying. How did this happen? What has God done in us to bring about this transformation?

It was the last day of the festival, the greatest day of the feast. The Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths – that's what the festival was called. It was a weeklong commemoration of God's presence and God's protection as His people Israel journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. A tabernacle is like temporary housing, a short-term, rude structure that served to protect them against the elements and that were easily put up and easily taken down. When they left Egypt, the Israelites were on the move, nomadic. On a deeper level, the Feast of Tabernacles was an annual reminder that we are a migrant people, that earth is not our home, that life here is temporary, but that God is with us, protecting us, leading us. That body you live in, it's temporary. The booth of your flesh, it's not going to endure. There's a reason for that. Sin is a wrecking ball. Sin is a morbid disease that is literally fused to that body of yours; your mind as

well. Have you ever seen a condemned building? I was in downtown San Diego recently. Right in the middle of town stood the urban blight of a condemned building – vacant, dilapidated, deteriorating. Everyone tries not to see it, but there it is. Because of sin, that's what we live in – a condemned building.

The last day of this Feast of Tabernacles involved a water ceremony. “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). This water ceremony was a reminder that God brought forth water from a rock in the desert (Exodus 17), that He turned bitter waters sweet (Exodus 15), and that the water of life would flow from the renewed Temple (Ezekiel 47), the dwelling place of God. All of this OT imagery was alive and vibrant in the minds of those who had come to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. As all of this is being played out among the people, Jesus lifts His voice and announces its true meaning. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

Does the culture around us want us to drink living water? What does the culture want you to drink? The culture wants you to drink from the cesspool of idolatry. The culture wants you to drink from the empty cistern of self. The culture wants you to drink the hemlock of humanism, the poison of hedonism, the salt water of unbelief, Satan, and hell. You see it all around you, don't you? How's that going for our fellow man? It's going very badly, isn't it? We have the blight of original sin in our being, but God created you for righteousness. Righteousness; it is a forgotten word in our godless age. When I walked in darkness, when, in my youth, I was habitually in shadowy places, God was at work on me, through His Word. Out; I knew that I had to get out. Does your soul thirst for more than what your sinful nature provides? Does your soul know that the culture is, at its unholy core, your enemy? Does your soul hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)? God knows precisely what your soul thirsts for. He has created you. He is at work in you. God Himself has piqued your thirst for righteousness. His Word, His Spirit is alive in you. “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Jesus is your righteousness. He wants you to drink of Him. That's why the Son of God was made man. St. John tells us that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. That's a bit of a lame translation. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us. The Son of God took upon Himself the temporary housing of our mortal flesh. In Him all the fullness of the deity dwelled in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). The Son of God came into our flesh in order to treat the source of our problem. All of the sinful blight that is in our souls... He took it. All the idolatry, all the hedonism, all the faithlessness, all the hate and the lust and the greed and the pride of sinful man, the Holy Son of God took it, He was condemned and He died. On the cross, God's eternal righteousness was on display. On the Holy Cross, all of God's saving love was poured out. “Father, forgive them.” And a Roman soldier came to this crucified King, and that soldier took a spear and thrust it into Jesus' side (John 19:34). Living water, water alive with life's blood, came pouring out of Jesus' side. That is your righteousness. Into the desert of our death, God has poured the living water of Christ's righteous and you drink of Him; you drink of Him and you are transformed (Isaiah 35).

Christ makes things alive. Christ has made you alive with His righteousness. You will have a resurrected body, (what was sown perishable will be raised imperishable – 1 Corinthians 15:42) but even now you have been transformed. The water of His righteousness is what you were baptized in; water alive with His blood has made you holy. The bitterness of our empty lives has been made sweet by His love, His presence. God has made His Spirit to live in you. The Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation when God brought forth life from lifelessness (Genesis 1:2), the Spirit that overshadowed the Virgin Mary and brought forth Him who is the resurrection and the life (Luke 1:35), that same Spirit was given to you when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Transformed; a new life is in you. Christ is the good tree that produces phenomenally good fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is in you for Christ and His righteousness is in you – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). When Jesus was on the cross He was like one from whom men hide their faces (Isaiah 53:3). Some folks in our day are trying very hard not to see Him, but we turn our faces entirely to Him. We press forward to hear His voice in His Word. We press forward to receive His absolution. We press forward to His altar to receive His body and blood. All this is captured in His declaration: “If anyone should thirst, let him who believes in Me drink. As the Scripture said: ‘Rivers of living water shall flow from His side.’” You drink of Christ and you are transformed. It is beautiful in God’s eyes. It is wondrous for us.