

I haven't actually said this to you, but I'm trying to focus on the Psalms this summer. Every week I've included at least one Psalm in the sermon, and also pull in relevant scripture from the New Testament that applies to the Psalm I'm talking about.

I'm working on something for this fall, based around Paul's letter to the Colossians. It hasn't totally jelled yet, but it's getting there, so hopefully starting in September, we'll switch our focus from the Psalms to Colossians.

I've always enjoyed walking in the woods with my dad. As a kid, it seemed like he knew everything. He never had to say "Let me look that up on Google" or "Let me check on that". He just seemed to always know the answers.

He can look at a tree and tell what it is by its bark. He can tell you what parts of specific trees and plants are edible (and if they taste good or not). He even taught himself what mushrooms were good to eat that grow on his land. Whenever anyone would ask him how he learned what mushrooms were OK to eat, he says "First, you need to learn which ones will kill you or make you really sick. All the rest are OK, they may just not taste good."

Something that a lot of people don't know about mushrooms is that what we see growing out of the dirt isn't the entire mushroom. That's just the fruit. The entire fungus that grows the mushroom lives entirely underground, and can be really huge. And while the actual fruit (what we call the mushroom) doesn't stay around long, the fungus that grows it can be around for a long time. It's estimated that a fungus that grows mushrooms in Oregon could be up to 2400 years old, and covers (or grows under, more accurately) 2200 acres of land!

When I was a kid living in Medway, we lived in a house right on the Penobscot River. It was always a beautiful location, but when we lived

there, the paper mill upstream dumped lots of sludge and chemicals into the river, and it wasn't safe to swim in, and you couldn't eat the fish (if you could catch anything out of it).

I remember several giant (to me) oak and elm trees growing on the river bank. Some of those trees were huge, and my older brothers had built a tree house in the lowest Y in one of the elm trees. If I remember right, that Y was about 20' off the ground or so! They were big trees.

The amazing thing to me about these trees is that they could stand so much. They were very strong, and could take strong winds, heavy rain, and heavy snow, without breaking. Until we had the problem with Dutch elm disease, they grew strong, straight, and tall. The oak trees on the river bank grew strong, too, and we never had any problems with any of them blowing over because of high winds or anything like that.

One of the problems we had living in Virginia during heavy wind and rain was trees being uprooted. Whenever there was a bad storm, there was always something on the news about a tree falling on a house or a car or something. Looking at those trees that fell over, there was always a huge root system around the trees, but the roots didn't seem to go down very deep. I have to wonder if that is caused by all the surface watering, but the tree not having to "dig deep" with its roots to get to water underground.

If you drive through (or fly over) some of the dryer parts of the country, the only place you see trees growing is on the banks of rivers and streams. The rest of the area is just grass, or scrub.

Trees grow best when they have water nearby, but if it's too easy to get to the water, the root system isn't deep enough to keep it standing in a bad storm.

In Psalm 1, David talks about trees, and growing in the right place.

Psalm 1

The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

- 1 *Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*
- 2 *but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.*
- 3 *He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.*
- 4 *The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*
- 5 *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*
- 6 *for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish. ¹*

David compares the wicked to the scrub that grows so far away from the rivers and streams. They're not very useful, and have shallow roots, so the wind will blow them over.

But there's more to trees than their roots. A good tree, a healthy tree, will produce *something*; leaves, nuts, fruit, *something*.

I remember in Boy Scouts, we were taught to be able to identify trees by the leaves, the bark, and any other distinguishing characteristics, like nuts or fruit or something like that. I was never very good at that, but for the most part I can tell some types of trees by looking at the shape of the leaves, or by the way the needles grow on evergreen trees. But I'm not always right.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ps 1:1–6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The thing to remember is that trees (and that fungus we talked about earlier) produce. It doesn't matter if what it produces is good or bad, the plant, tree, or fungus produces *something*. That helps us identify them.

As Christians we are called to bear fruit; but the thing to remember is that everyone, Christian or non-Christian, bears fruit.

Back when we lived in Medway, we had a small orchard. We had 4 or 5 apple trees, (crab apple and regular) and two plum trees. Dad had grafted different varieties of apples onto some of the trees. I loved watching dad graft different apple buds or limbs onto the trees we had in the orchard. It was amazing to me that one tree could have so many different varieties growing on it.

My mom would make apple pie and apple jelly with the apples from some of the trees in the orchard; but we had one tree in the far corner that produced what my dad called "TV apples". TV apples weren't a specific variety of apple, that was when it was recommended that you eat them; watching TV in a semi-dark room. Why? Well, that particular tree was known to have wormy apples, and if you ate the apple watching TV, you never knew if you got a worm in your apple or not. The apples were good to eat, but they were wormy. I don't remember my dad ever being successful at getting rid of the worms in that apple tree.

Both John the Baptizer and Jesus knew that some fruit trees produced good fruit, and some fruit trees produced bad fruit.

Matthew 3:4-10

⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²

Matthew 7:15-20

A Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. ³

Matthew 12:33-37

³³ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Mt 3:4–10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Mt 7:15–20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”⁴

So, if we produce fruit, what fruit do we produce? And how can you tell if a person produces good fruit or bad fruit?

Well, Paul helps us out here. In his letter to the Christians in Galatia, Paul tells them what good fruit and bad fruit look like.

Galatians 5:16-24

Keep in Step with the Spirit

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ⁵

What Paul is telling us is that when we become Christians, when we repent of our past sins and are baptized into Christ, we should have killed off our sinful nature – crucified it. Unfortunately, we fail in a lot of our attempts to stop sinning. The thing to remember is that even

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Mt 12:33–37). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ga 5:16–24). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

though we're trying to produce good fruit, we will fail from time to time. But that doesn't mean we should just give up and stop trying.

I've been going to Weight Watcher's to lose weight now for about a year and a half. I've made some progress, but lately things haven't been going so well. But I want to share with you something that one of the meeting leaders told me about losing weight. She told me "When you have a flat tire, you don't get out of the car and then slash the other three, right? No, you fix that tire and keep going." Being a Christian is like that, too. We're going to fail, but that doesn't mean that we're a bad person. Sometimes one apple from a tree has bruises on it. That doesn't mean it's time to cut down the tree and grow a new one.

Christianity is a difficult journey, but it's all about the final destination, and trying to bring as many people along with us as possible.

Proverbs 4:10-19 (Opening)

- 10 *Hear, my son, and accept my words,
that the years of your life may be many.*
- 11 *I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.*
- 12 *When you walk, your step will not be hampered,
and if you run, you will not stumble.*
- 13 *Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
guard her, for she is your life.*
- 14 *Do not enter the path of the wicked,
and do not walk in the way of the evil.*
- 15 *Avoid it; do not go on it;
turn away from it and pass on.*
- 16 *For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.*
- 17 *For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.*
- 18 *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*
- 19 *The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.*

Matthew 21:18, 19 (closing)

- 18 *In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.*
- 19 *And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.*

Questions

1. Do you see any correlation between Psalm 1 and Luke 8:4-8?
2. Should Matthew 12:36, 37 worry you?
3. Are we like trees and have no choice about the kind of fruit we produce, or do we have a choice?