

A Song of Trees

For those of you who live far north of the Mason-Dixon Line, you may be surprised to know we just experienced autumn. We had a first freeze just a few days ago and some of our trees are now bearing witness. It seems the colors this year are exceptional. Plants take water from the ground through their roots and carbon dioxide from the air. Plants use the sunlight to turn water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and glucose. Plants use glucose as food for energy and as a building block for growing. The way plants turn water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and sugar is called photosynthesis, which literally means, “putting together with light.” A chemical called chlorophyll helps make photosynthesis happen. Chlorophyll is what gives plants their green color. As winter approaches, the trees shut down their food making process and the chlorophyll disappears from the trees. Job said, “...*speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee...*” (Job 12:8). Let’s allow God to speak to us through this seasonal change and see if He doesn’t have a message for us. How could this process relate to our lives? David said, “*Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD...*” (I Chronicles 16:33). Let’s listen to the song of the trees!

1. The most beautiful trees are the sweetest ones.

In some trees the glucose, a form of sugar, is trapped in the leaves after photosynthesis stops and the combination of the sunlight and cool autumn nights cause the leaves to turn colors. As the life cycle becomes dormant, it’s the trees that have the sweetness retained that make the most beautiful display in God’s nature.

An old preacher friend of mine was a close friend with Joe Henry Hankins, the famed pastor from Arkansas. Dr. Hankins was known for his compassionate heart even in his old age. My old friend asked Dr. Hankins what was the secret to his compassionate heart and pathos in his preaching. Old Dr. Hankins replied, “Every day I pray, ‘Lord, keep me sweet,’ because I have seen many older people become bitter with life and I don’t want to ever become that way.”

Life is full of disappointments. I love the words of the reformer, Martin Luther who wrote in his famous hymn, How Firm a Foundation, “When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie, My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply; The flame shall not hurt thee -- I only design Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.” God has designed the heartaches to help us not hurt us. No wonder the Bible says, “*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*” (I Thessalonians 5:18). This is only one out of two places in the entirety of Scripture we find the words “...*this is the will of God...concerning you.*” The Word of God is teaching us to get better, not bitter about life. The next time you see one of those beautifully colored trees, just remember that’s a sweet tree and pray, “Lord, keep me sweet.”

2. The true colors come out when the life cycle runs its course.

The lovely yellows, golds and reds are actually already in the trees. During spring and summer the chlorophyll is so strong in the leaves we cannot see the true colors. So it takes the near death of the tree to see the true colors.

Have you ever heard, “Well, he or she is showing their true colors”? We cannot always judge where a person is spiritually speaking when the summer winds have kept life very cozy and warm for us. It is usually not until the cold winter wind gives us a reality check that the real person is seen. Do we shine forth beautifully when this time comes or do we respond very carnally to the events and circumstances to which our Lord exposes us? If God doesn’t send the winter, the world will never see the flamboyant Christian testimony that comes forth. Thinking again of Luther’s old song, I am reminded of Proverbs 25:4, “*Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.*”

3. We are to be God’s Christmas Tree!

A young elementary age student named Wyatt asked Brian Jorgenson of Boise Community Forestry Service, “Why do evergreen trees stay green all year round?” Mr. Jorgenson answered, “Evergreen trees (trees that keep their leaves year-round instead of losing them all at once) originated in cold, northern climates. In the north, the growing season (spring/summer) is very short compared to that of the south. Trees use light to make food through photosynthesis. In order to survive in the shorter growing seasons, trees need to gather light all year long. The only way to do this is to gather light for photosynthesis in the winter. (However, trees can only photosynthesize when water is available in a useful form, so when the only available water is snow or ice, even evergreen trees are dormant. They rest until conditions are right for photosynthesis to start again.)

Botanists long ago discovered that needles are actually regular leaves that are rolled up very tightly. This shape is an adaptation that allows evergreens to conserve water (also necessary for photosynthesis). Evergreen needles also have a very waxy coating that helps save water during summer and winter.

Try this experiment: put two cups of water on a table in the sun, leave one cup open to the air, but cover the other with plastic wrap. The sun's energy begins to evaporate the water. From which cup does the water evaporate faster? The answer to this experiment will help you to understand how the waxy covering on evergreen needles helps conserve water.

There is your answer...evergreen trees are regular trees whose leaves are rolled up and covered with wax! This way they can make food for themselves all year long (as long as water is available in a useful form), without drying out.”

“*The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted*” (Psalm 104:16). Cedars are evergreen. Christ hung upon a dead tree so that we might be planted in the soil of God’s mercy and grace and bloom in evergreen freshness!

God says, “*As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters*” (Numbers 24:6). In Psalm 1:3 it says, “*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*” God likens

His obedient children to that cedar tree beside the waters! I would be remiss not to make this application: God allowed His precious Son to come into the world, lay in a wooden trough in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, which were burial clothes for the dead. This Only Begotten Son lived the perfect life we could have never lived and then hung on a dead tree, the old rugged cross. But on that old dead tree, our Lord showed His true colors. His opening words were most sweet, “...*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...*” (Luke 23:34). We behold Him and declare with the centurion, “...*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Matthew 27:54). So in this life and the one beyond we can be God’s Christmas tree, which is basically a decorated evergreen that tells a story. We can be evergreen because Christ took our “fall” and gives us springtime all year round.

-Pastor Pope-

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