

“Oaks of Righteousness”

Isaiah 61:1-3

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I remember being in elementary school, it was always so exciting when firemen came to do a presentation at school. Back then I associated those fire trucks with the possibility of being the cool kid who was invited onto the truck. We are instructed to...stop, drop, and roll when there is a fire. After hearing this presentation- I thought I was essentially an expert.

I thought this for a very long time until one day I had to get a physical done to be cleared to play high school sports. I had done this so many times so I believed I was an expert at this as well. This visit went a little differently than normal. The doctor asked me a series of questions-- one of them about fire safety. I thought I had this one in the bag considering all of my extensive stop, drop, and roll knowledge. But she threw in a lot of twists and turns. I will never forget this interaction... She asked me what I would do if there was a fire within my home. I was able to recite the typical check the door to feel if it's hot, crawl under smoke ect.

My childhood home was two floors. She asked me what I would do if the fire was right outside my door. I thought about this in my context- Well I would have to go out the window. There was a tree beneath my window and these lovely rocks my dad decided must be a part of the landscaping- so I thought yikes it might hurt to go out the window, so I decided-final answer would be i would somehow fight to get my mattress outside of the window and jump to safety on that. I don't really know what I was picturing, whether it be some magic carpet situation as I float to my safety or if I thought I would fall gracefully- but the doctor did not like my answer very much and apparently thought I was rather unprepared to take on that situation properly.

As I thought about why she asked me these questions I realized what I might have been missing- being prepared is a big part of health-knowing what to do when safety was compromised is really important. These extra questions she asked me- really forced me to confront things that might be destructive or dangerous. Fire safety suddenly turned into a lot more than getting on a cool truck.

We have been studying the book of Isaiah in the clues to Christmas. I hope that everyone enjoyed the holiday- we were even graced with snow Christmas eve morning- light and fluffy thankfully! This week I want to conclude the study in Isaiah by reading Isaiah 61 1-3.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,[a]

2

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,

3

and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.

This last verse catches my attention. "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor"

I wouldn't claim to be an expert on foliage: this is a photo of a plant that was placed in my care. So we know that is not my strongsuit! However, there are a few facts I know about Oak trees:

1. Oak trees mature at about 75 years and have an average lifespan of 150-200 years. The oldest oak trees are over 1,000 years old! - This tells me that oaks have longevity- they are created to be long lasting- they spend their entire lives growing and maturing.
2. Oak trees are most associated with strength and stability. They can withstand many storms because their roots are deep-I love this concept of deep roots-when we are deeply rooted in God's word- it doesn't change the fact that storms can come and go, lightning can strike- but our roots hold us firmly in solid ground.

3. Lastly, only 1 acorn in 10, 000 will grow into a tree.

Life with Christ is the road less traveled- the road not easily or normally taken. We like what is convenient- our youth group is studying what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship has a cost- it is entirely worth the price and we receive 10 fold what we put in; but much like that 1 acorn- we can grow into a strong oak of righteousness!

I read verse 3 and think to myself how good God is to empower his people and compare us to oaks of righteousness.

When I see that Oaks have longevity I am thankful that the Lord equips us in storms, that we are being built up to live with the Lord for eternity, when I hear that oaks are created stable- I can see that even when my roots feel like they are coming lose- the Lord can keep me be stable- I notice that only 1 acorn out of 10,000 grows into an oak and I lose my breath knowing that even if it is the road less traveled that 1 in 10,000 get to be those oak trees and that applies to us! It is astounding to be one of those oaks.

Reading through the book of Isaiah this oak title stands out so much to me- Israel(or God's people) were not always an oak of righteousness. We see in chapter 1 verse 4-7

4 Woe to the sinful nation,
a people whose guilt is great,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the Lord;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.
7 Your country is desolate,
your cities burned with fire;
your fields are being stripped by foreigners
right before you,
laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

Instead of being a lush forest, filled with strong oaks, it seems that Smokey the bear should pay them a visit. When we choose to go our own way, down a path that's easier or more appealing to our human hearts Isaiah writes in verse 30.

You will be like an oak with fading leaves,
like a garden without water.

It takes a couple of chapters... but to go from withering/burned to blooming is astounding. Between these passages- there is a turning point. There is a difference maker- a solution....

I often feel unprepared when left to my own devices. I don't feel like a strong oak tree. Withered, dry, gasping for air. I can always tell when I haven't spent time in God's word- because when I take that first sip again- it's a gulp so satisfying- so enriching- so life giving you will never want to run that dry again. Before Jesus I looked withered, worn, roots unstable, but I am offered more in Jesus name. Before I accepted the gifts prophesied in Isaiah 61, I looked a lot like a withered, burnt oak tree, like lightning and storms had hit and caught fire, my leaves withering- I had looked like the destruction I surrounded myself with. Not the strong oak He promises to make us in His name.

There is a hope- a solution- an answer- a miracle grow for our roots if you will. Jesus. He proclaims good news to the poor, he binds up the broken heart, he gives freedom to the captives, releases prisoners from darkness, he comforts all who are mourning, he bestowed on them a crown of beauty instead ashes, we will be called oaks of righteousness when we were first an oak with fading leaves- without water.

Today I want to remind you of the good news of Jesus. No matter your circumstances- the spirit of the Lord is on you, if your heart is broken- he puts those pieces back together, if you are down on your luck- he gives you good news of his saving grace, no matter what holds you captive- he breaks those chains- no matter the darkness you sit in- He shines light upon it- there is not a corner of the earth He can't find in you in, if you are mourning- you will be comforted- No matter how withered your leaves may be- he can turn you into an oak of righteousness. Oaks of righteousness accept the gift of eternal life and take the road less traveled- these Oaks form deep roots by connecting to their planter- their gardener, getting all the nutrients from the richness of His love.

How do we know if we are an Oak of Righteousness?

1. We are filled with the spirit- oaks have long lives- while are numbered days on earth look different- each oak of righteousness has the gift of eternal life with Jesus- during our time here on earth- we should be seeking maturity by growing to look more like Jesus
2. Oaks of righteousness have strong roots- Oaks trees are strong and stable- this is because of their roots. In order to be a oak of righteousness we need to be rooted in God's word- to rely on the one who is truly strong and stable- I know two things about the Lord- his heart is good and His arms are strong- oaks of righteousness have strength only given by the Lord

3. We are 1 in 10,000- being a disciple of Christ is the road less taken- being a disciple, an oak in His forest, it takes work- choosing to be all in for Christ is 1 in 10,000 but that one oak will grow long, tall and strong- life with Jesus gives us just that- eternity with God, stability because he is unchanging and having true relationship with the planter

Like Israel, God has a plan for your redemption.to quote Nathaniel from two weeks ago “ You were on His mind on the cross and in the manger” I loved that line- you were a part of the plan the whole time- that turning point was always coming! Without Jesus we are withering oaks, with Jesus we are Oaks of Righteousness.

When we go our own way we will be like an oak with fading leaves- no water in sight- but when we decide to accept why Jesus was sent- well, that makes all the difference. Much like trees struck down by storms, ones that have caught fire- maybe the types of trees that wouldn't pass a fire safety test when the fires of life come? Will we be prepared? we can be destroyed by the works of this world- when we don't know what to do, when our roots get exposed or we don't realize what might attempt to rip our roots from under us- we face the same fate I did in that doctors office that day... being unprepared in front of a caring physician. Our physician has all the answers- He instructs us daily in what it means to be oaks of righteousness. When we really buy in to what the Lord has for us, he takes those broken branches and plants us to be brand new, with deep roots, he gives us bark that the fires of life cannot destroy. Finding refuge in the Lord is a lot more valuable than being able to explore a cool truck- God's word equips us to face the storms, setting aside quiet time with Him can force us to confront obstacles and help us with solutions just as my doctor did that day. Fire could never touch an oak who is planted in God's soil. Consider the road you want to travel on.

If you have never asked Jesus in your heart- today I encourage you to. Trade in those withered leaves for strong roots only found in Jesus. “It will make all the difference”

Pray with me.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the gift of your word. When we study it, we see your face, your truth. Equip us daily to be oaks of righteousness. Be the planter that clips away bad leaves and branches. Be the planter that waters us with your word, that gives our roots strength each day as we spend time with you. You are true to your promises. While Israel might not have always looked like Oaks of Righteous, the truth of your word promises to be with us as the storms of life come. I pray for

each person listening today Lord, that your face shine upon them, grow us into a forest in your name, each Oak of righteousness encouraging another. Thank you for always being faithful in your promises. We love you and are so thankful for the gift of strength you give us everyday. In Jesus name, Amen.