



## “Tree of Life”

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Saturday & Sunday, June 16–17, 2018

All Services

The Reverend John H. Brock  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Ezekiel 17:22-24; Mark 4:26-34

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

It should be pretty much not any kind of shock to the majority of you when I say that I *really enjoy* going to Walt Disney World in Florida (*for Father's Day, I just received a book called Maps of Disney, that shows many of the various iterations of both Disneyland and Walt Disney World, that's how much of a Disney nerd I am*). Each of the four parks have their own icon. Magic Kingdom has the castle. Epcot has Spaceship earth, or as we in the Brock family like to call it, the Golf ball. Animal Kingdom, though, has the Tree of Life.

This Boabob tree is the centerpiece of the park. It is *huge*, standing 145-foot-tall with a 50-foot base. It has over 8,000 branches of various sizes. It is covered with over 102,000 leaves, each one being more than a foot long. It has more than 300 detailed carvings of animals, both real and imagined. Boabob trees have been estimated at living up to 2,500 years, or possibly even longer. There is even a theater in its base that can seat over 400. And at night, the sides of the tree are used for an amazing light show.

Since this is Disney, you probably know, or suspect, that this tree is not naturally grown, but rather is, indeed, of human construct. What you might not know is that the framework for this amazing, beautiful, icon, is . . . an oil drilling rig. The framework, the very core, of this tree was designed for a different use entirely. And the tree itself looks pretty much nothing like that from which it came. Funny, isn't it, how some things can look nothing like from that which they came.

In our first reading, Ezekiel is talking to the people of Jerusalem at a time when doom is impending. The northern Kingdom of Israel was invaded and wiped out by the Assyrians decades before. In their arrogance, the people of the southern kingdom of Judah thought

*the Lord God is NEVER going to let anything bad happen to us; we have the temple we have a descendant of David on our throne we are the true people of God, and nothing bad will befall us.*

The problem was, of course, that as a whole, the people - and by the people, I mean the governing body, the religious leaders, as well as the everyday folk - had all pretty much come to take their faith life, as well as those promises made to them through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for granted. They were pretty much outright actively *ignoring* those covenants.

One of the big things about covenants is, however, they are *two sided*. **Both** sides need to live up to the agreement. If only one side is living toward it, and the other party is not, then the entire thing is out of balance. Which is what was happening in Jerusalem in Ezekiel's day. And that's what a great deal of Ezekiel's message to the people was all about:

*We have turned away from the Lord God Almighty. If we don't come back, God is going to allow something bad to happen to us.*

His message in our reading today, though, is *different* from what he was saying prior to and immediately after. The midst of this message about impending doom, we hear this message of *hope*; a message of *promise*; a message of *new life*. He uses the image of a tree, planted in an unlikely spot: the top of a mountain. More, this cedar tree will be a tree filled with life, a tree that will produce fruit. It will be a tree that will look like nothing that is around it. It *will* be like **Faith** from an unexpected place.

Similarly, our gospel message, Jesus uses that same kind of imagery. Jesus talks about the mustard seeds. They're small, insignificant. yet when they are planted, watered, and cared for, they can grow into a bush. Jesus says they can grow into even a *large* bush, one big enough to shade and shelter birds and other wildlife. They can tower above an average size person. Those mustard bushes look *nothing* like that from which they came.

I came across this reading about seeds from Henry David Thoreau. He wrote:

"In the spring of 1857, I planted six seeds sent to me by the Patent Office, and labeled, I think, *Poitrine jaune grosse*, large yellow squash. Two came up, and one bore a squash that weighed 123½ pounds, the other bore four, weighing together 186¼ pounds. Who would have believed that there was 310 pounds of *poitrine jaune grosse* in that corner of my garden? . . . A little mysterious hoeing and manuring was all the *abracadabra presto change* that I used, and lo! true to the label, they found me 310 pounds of *poitrine jaune grosse* there, where it never was known to be, nor was before." -

Henry David Thoreau, "The Succession of Forest Trees," in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Excursions, translations, and poems* (Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 203.

Small, insignificant seeds, producing 310 pounds of Food! HUGE payoff from such a small beginning.

All of us start out small, as a child, as new at work, as a baptized Child of God. How do you grow, though, that's the question? How do you grow, personally, professionally, faith-wise? Do you, now, today, look or act or believe like you did when you first started your job, or when you graduated high school, or when you were confirmed? Have you grown, changed, become stronger or weaker, better or worse? What is grounding you, giving you roots, giving you strength in each of those?

Maybe your faith was small, and now it's bloomed and grown and blossomed into something huge and wonderful and marvelous. Maybe your beginnings, from where

you come, were something else entirely different from what you are now. What matters is, where is your faith *today*? Now that we have faith, now that we know what Christ calls us to do - which is simply love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, body, and strength, AND love our neighbor as our self, what are you doing with your faith?

God has given us faith therefore, we are called to spread that faith, and use it - like the mustard bush, like the cedar way up on the top of the mountain - to help others to spread the new life of Christ to those around us.

Disney's Tree of Life is full of surprises full of joy, full of wonder. Whether that joy comes from being in the theater or looking at the carvings of animal or watching the tree trunk as it is used for projections and light shows. The tree is there to represent life - all life. Life, though, is more than the flash bang of an adventure park. Faith life needs structure, something solid, real, to build upon.

That's what both Ezekiel and Jesus are saying: Allow God to give you the structure, however big, however small, and change it. Build on it. Allow God to Make you into something new, something wonderful something from which you could not imagine. Allow God to create in you your own Tree of Life.

Amen.

Copyright © 2018, John H. Brock. All rights reserved.



[www.trinitycamphill.org](http://www.trinitycamphill.org)