

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6) – June 16, 2024

“²⁴And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

–Ezekiel 17:24–

It has been said that one way to dispose of an old, tattered bible is to bury it in the earth and plant a tree on top of it. Why? The idea is that the bible was written down on paper—paper that came from a tree. Burying it beneath a new tree allows the tattered pages to be returned to the earth, to nourish the new growing tree. Then, perhaps, that tree might one day be used to make paper for a new bible. And so the cycle comes full circle.

We find countless images of trees throughout Scripture. Here in this passage from Ezekiel we have a few verses that are reminiscent of Jesus’ parables. The Lord uses the images of a tree and birds as a way to talk about the Kingdom of God. Birds find refuge in a tree. It’s a place of safekeeping for them. Ezekiel speaks of a “sprig of Judah” in verse 22. This image might sound a lot like Isaiah 11: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” This “shoot” or “sprig” we know to be Jesus Christ.

Jesus grows like any human being, from a tiny infant into an adult. As he becomes an adult, he is sent forth to complete the work and mission God intended for him. As this tree grows and spreads its branches, birds will flock to it, finding refuge in its shade and branches. All the other trees will know that this tree is different. All the other trees will know God and will fear God, acknowledging his power and wisdom.

It is God who brings the low tree high and the high tree low. It is God who dries up the green tree and makes the dry tree flourish. God is the one with the authority and power to make these things happen. It is not up to you and me. God is bigger than the human authorities and power. He always has been, and he always will be. And that’s great news for us because God is always ready to restore us to life and salvation with him, finding refuge in him, much like a bird finds safety and refuge in a large tree.

The image of birds in a tree also drums up the image of a family tree. Indeed, we are members of the family of God. May we find refuge and security in Jesus Christ, the source of life and salvation.

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