**“Tree of Life”**

Psalm 52 (antiphon v. 13)

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Revelation 22:1-20

Matthew 28:1-10

Easter

From Psalm 52, verse 13: “Behold, **My Servant** shall act wisely; He shall be **high and lifted up**, and shall be **exalted**.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

An angel with a flaming sword guards the way to the tree of life. And **no one may approach**. And **no one may taste of that fruit of life** … **until** **what’s remembered today** … when an angel, bright as lightning, shocks others guarding the way to a place of death … and **they flee**. And **now ANY may again taste of the tree that gives life**.

As this day brings to the conclusion of where our Midweek Lenten Messages (Living among the Bible’s Trees) have been leading all along, in one sense **we’ve come full circle**. Where we’re given **to return to** is a tree **precious and once available** within the blest garden of Eden … the Tree of **Life** …

**… and CONSIDERING THAT TREE, WE REALISE THAT,**

**ATHOUGH WHAT WE DESERVE IS GOD’S BARRING US FROM IT,**

**JESUS’ SACRED DEATH UPON A CROSS MAKES**

**THAT ONE THE TREE OF LIFE …**

**AND WE HAVE THE FRUIT OF IT (LIFE) TO EAT BY GIFT.**

1

It’s **spoken of** (that Tree of Life) not only at the beginning of the book of Genesis and at the end of Revelation, but also (implicitly if not explicitly) in today’s reading from Ezekiel and explicitly (for sure) other places in Scripture that I’ll mention later. But before we go further, know that what Ezekiel and Revelation both are is something called “**apocalyptic**”—which is, in Scriptural literature, **visionary and prophetic**, **visual and revelatory**, so **showing** **things that otherwise might seem concealed**. As a matter of fact, it’s **believers (and only believers)** who are made to be well-positioned-to **understand** such as is Ezekiel and Revelation. We, see, know that God planted a garden in Eden with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in its midst and commanded the man He gave that garden to to not eat of the one tree of the knowledge of good **and evil** lest he **die from that evil**. But the woman, when she doubted that word from God, ate of it with her husband such that God, **graciously drove them** from that garden, placing cherubim with a flaming sword in their way, and guarded them against an **un-holy access** to a the tree of life eternal that would (**without redemption**) **keep them in that fallen state**.

In today’s Second Reading (from Revelation 22), we hear of that Tree of Life “**transplanted then, as it were**, from out of Eden to be **made available in the coming newly redeemed and remade world**”. Shown in Revelation, the Genesis’ Garden of Eden’s Paradise—especially its river and tree—essentially **merges, reborn, in the Holy City of God (the New Jerusalem)**. It’s the **place** redeemed believers **inherit and live** as the culmination of a rebirth and faithful perseverance **even here on earth**. In the New Jerusalem, there’s a main street (for instance) and a river that, it says, runs straight-through the center of the city. On either side of that river is the “Tree of Life” and, so also, **access** to its “food of immortality” which is a glorious (even literal) way of expressing **Christians’ share in the eternal life to come**. In an Advent hymn, Jesus gets called-on by singers to **restore to us that lost Paradise** (to **lead us past the flaming sword wielded by the seraphim, and OPEN HEAVEN’S DOORS FOR US TO ENTER IT**).

It might be tempting to think it **unfair** that **suffering in this life** occurs, though, among the **seemingly innocent** (**everyone’s** banishment from Eden because of two people). **Original sin** seems an **unfair burden**. But we’d be, in that, overlooking **our** rebellious, negligent, and selfish propensities. On the basis of **our sin**, God could send us forever away from Himself and His Paradise that He’s got reserved for the **perfectly-appreciative**. **We** could be sentenced to what we **deserve** in an eternal brand of punishment … and as we heard in the Revelation reading, outside the New Jerusalem city **are** “the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” which is **us** on our own in thoughts and, often, words and deeds. Like Adam and Eve, **our trust** is not always fully in God’s Words, **giving** them (not always) our unconditional reverence and obedience. So, on account of, not only, our **sinful** **nature and propensity**, but also our **actual** **sins**, we deserve to not be in God’s presence. The only way that can **happen** is if He **calls us to it** and **enables us to be there**. It takes Him **granting us access, graciously allowing us to repent, believe, and receive His forgiveness through faith in His Son Jesus Christ** …

2

… and so He does. **Between** Genesis, with those cherubim **keeping humanity from the Tree of Life**, and Revelation, **returning some to even eating of it forever**, **SOMETHING CHANGED!** Genesis, Revelation, and the other 64 books of the Bible tell-of the **prophecy and fulfillment** of a woman’s **Offspring** suffering the bruising of His own heel, just to crush (though, in the process) the head the serpent, Satan. And Ezekiel saw a vision of **God’s Temple at the end of time, living water flowing from it**, and John (in his vision) **showed that water flowing from God’s throne and the victorious sacrificial Lamb, raised to life**. The **Temple**, then, is shown as **God Redemption Himself in Jesus**

And Jesus (God’s Lamb) **makes all this possible through His death upon a cross, confirmed by His rising**. He died, carrying on His flesh **our sin and our sinfulness** **but** **God** (the Alpha and Omega / the beginning and the end). He was **GOD BECOME MAN**, born of a virgin, fathered by the Heavenly Father, yet of the lineage of men as also the Shoot (or Branch) of a seemingly dead human line in **Jesse’s tree**. And then the dead wood of the cross that killed Jesus **became just as alive (through His Resurrection) as He did on Easter** **… THE Tree of Life ITSELF / THE living tree that the Revelation shows it to be**. And **we’ve received** **the** **life of that tree**, invited to **SEE** **its life always** through the testimony of Easter (hear it again): “now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there **was** a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and **rolled back the stone** and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said **to the women**, ‘**Do not be afraid**, for **I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified**. **He is not here, for He has risen, as He said.** **COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE HE LAY**.’” **COME!** …..

In Genesis, Ezekiel, and John’s Revelation, **water and that Tree of Life figure are shown together and prominently, depicting salvation**. The **river of salvation** is shown as increasing its flow from the throne of God and His Lamb to **bring life to an otherwise (for instance) Dead Sea** and the **Jordan of Heavenly water of salvation that’s our baptism is where we, born dead from our trespasses and sins (“no one is righteous, not one”), are touched and washed and given life by God’s promise**. We receive His name there (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) with Christ’s cross literally **marking us as His (linked to Him and His death and resurrection) with** **that mark** upon our foreheads and upon our hearts as **having been Redeemed by The Crucified and Risen One**. Robes **adorn us** then “washed white in the blood of the Lamb” and called saints (**CHANGED**) **with access to God’s Tree of Life (a place where fed and sheltered / protected / secure)**. And as Revelation shows, even **desert (like struggle and challenge and pandemic)** touched by the river of salvation flowing from the Tree of Life **gives way** as banks touched by its water **fill with trees yielding different kinds of fruit each month, leaves of which are for the healing of the nations**. Such **trees spread life** and exist even **now in us as the blessings of our work in God’s glory is brought by us to this world**, **GOSPEL brought to it through our mouths**, and **(for us) the Sacrament of the Altar (as God satisfying hunger and thirst the same way He will for every day of eternity) ours even now**.

I mentioned earlier that there were a couple of other places in the Bible that explicitly speak of the Tree of Life and our blessedness from it. The 4 I was most-specifically thinking-of are in Proverbs. **Wisdom** (in the first) is called **a Tree of Life**, and it’s because we (who lay hold of it) **are** **blessed** (Prov. 3:18). The **fruits of righteousness (of the righteous)** are second, and described also as a **Tree of Life**, and **that** for others’ benefit as well as our own (Prov. 11:30). A **gentle tongue** likewise is a third as a **Tree of Life** (Prov. 15:4), because **that is one who speaks the Gospel**. Then a **desire fulfilled** (a fourth, as in **the desire for eternal life and all things of eternal life**) is a **Tree of Life**, (Prov. 13:12). **All** **explain what God brings to us and the world in LIFE** **(wisdom, fruits of the righteous, a gentle tongue, and fulfilled desire)**. **By God’s grace**, **we** **become those** (spoken **about us** and **by us** just over 6 weeks ago in Ash Wednesday’s Psalm 1): a “**tree ourselves** **planted by streams of water yielding its fruit in due season, our leaves not withering**”, **us displaying LIFE that extends through us from the Tree of Life** …

**… and CONSIDERING THAT ONE MAIN SOURCE TREE,**

**WE REALISE THAT,**

**ATHOUGH WHAT WE DESERVE IS GOD’S BARRING US FROM IT,**

**JESUS’ SACRED DEATH UPON A CROSS MAKES**

**THAT ONE THE TREE OF LIFE …**

**AND WE HAVE THE FRUIT OF IT (LIFE) TO EAT (AND SHARE) BY GIFT.**

In our Lenten (now Easter) Series of meditations and considerations: “Living among the Bible’s Trees), **here’s where its all led**. Trees have, certainly, pointed out our **need for a Savior upon sacrifice upon a tree**, but also **His provision that way**. In the **PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS THE CHRIST**, God the Father **saved lives, giving the Tree to which repentant believers look**. **By Jesus** (and **through God’s mercy and grace provided by His death then raised in victory on Easter and our baptism into Him and all of that**), **WE HAVE the Life the cross gives**.

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! A BLESSED EASTER LIFE TO YOU! Amen.**