

CHRIST THE BRANCH AND OUR CALL TO BEAR FRUIT

(1) A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Romans 7:4-6

John 12:23-26

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SCRIPTURE

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:14-16 NRSV).

⁴In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Romans 7:4-6 NRSV).

²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor (John 12:23-26 NRSV).

MESSAGE

There are many themes in Scripture tied to a specific image. Christ and the branch would be an example. Today marks the beginning of a series that focuses on Christ as the Branch raised up and ties that theme to our bearing fruit for him in various ways. Each message will feature a key verse related to Christ, our Branch, and then applies that verse to how we should grow in our own faith as plantings of the Lord.

The key verse for today is from Jeremiah:

I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up (Jer 33:15 NRSV).

"I've fallen and I can't get up!" The line was made famous in a television commercial about a medical alert system for the elderly. With the press of a button the fallen individual could call for help: "I've fallen and I can't get up!" That sentence does not just apply to an elderly person in need of help. That sentence is an advertisement for our lives and for all of creation: We've fallen and we can't get up.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." That's another famous sentence, and a far older one. By his Word God called the world into existence. He separated light from darkness and made the sky and sun and stars. He parted the waters and caused dry land to appear. He raised up plants and trees, and after he created humanity in his own image, God planted a garden where Adam and Eve could live and work. In that garden God placed trees filled with fruit, and in the center of Eden, he put "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Adam and Eve could eat of any other tree, but not that one. Disobedience to God's command would bring death.

This story is widely known. Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and Satan, symbolized by a deceitful snake, told Eve to "Take and eat" of the forbidden fruit. She did and humanity fell from grace.

But what exactly *was* this forbidden fruit that the clever snake tricked Eve, and subsequently Adam, into eating? Was it an apple? No. There is no mention of an apple. The fruit is not specified. Was it something other than literal food? Yes. Was it sex, as some medieval teachers believed? No. God described sex as very good and told them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:31,28). Was it disobedience? Well, this is closer to the mark. They disobeyed God and sin and death entered the world. But there is something more here than just disobedience.

They wanted the knowledge of good and evil. But some would ask, "Didn't they already know that?" Yes, they did. But their source for knowing was God. God did not keep the knowledge of good and evil *from* them. God kept the knowledge *for* them. The original sin was not simply disobedience but the desire to be like God, that is, to choose for themselves what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. In a sense, the snake did not deceive them as much as he exploited a self-deception that had sprung up within them.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate (Gen 3:6 NRSV).

In other words, they believed they could do just as good a job (if not a better job) as God in determining what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. But they could not. Consequently, truth became stained with lies, goodness corrupted with evil, and beauty with hatred. “Take and eat,” says the Evil One, “And you won’t need God.” But it is a lie. And when we fall for the lie we fall from our relationships. Our relationship with nature – cursed. Our relationship to one another – cursed. Our relationship to God – cursed. And this self-deception continues to plague humanity to this day. We have fallen and we can’t get up.

But God did not leave his creation—he did not leave us—without hope. As in the beginning God raised up his creation by his Word, he would one day by his Word raise up his fallen creatures. He promised a Savior who would someday come and crush the tempting serpent and destroy his power. Again and again God repeated his promise of hope to the people of Israel as he spoke through the prophets. God would send a Child, a Son born of a virgin. The one to come would be the Hope of Israel and the Light of the Gentiles. He would be a suffering Servant, an innocent Lamb led to slaughter for the sins of the world. He would be born into the tribe of Judah, born into the royal house of King David.

That royal line of David was cut off as Israel was invaded and conquered by other nations. But God repeated his promise. He would cause a Righteous Branch to spring up from David's fallen family tree. This Branch of David's line would rule with justice and righteousness. God's people would be saved. They would dwell securely, ruled by the power and justice of the Righteous Branch. The royal house had fallen, but God would save his people. From among God's people of Israel would come the Righteous Branch, the Anointed One, who would bring salvation to the fallen world. What had fallen would be raised up.

At the right time, the promised Child, the Word made flesh, and the fulfillment of the promise made in Eden, was raised up. God himself came to live among his people, to walk again on his created earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Righteous Branch of the house of David, was raised up for the very purpose of being cut down for us. The Righteous Branch was lifted up on a cross, where he died, suffering the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins. He was cut down by death to raise up what was fallen. In order to grow to new life, a seed must be buried in the earth. Like that seed, Jesus, the

crucified Savior, was buried, sealed in a guarded tomb. But like a new plant that springs to life from the buried seed, the Righteous Branch of the house of David sprang to life again. What had fallen was raised up!

We are fallen in sin and we are unable to save ourselves. But the Holy Spirit calls us through the Word, the Good News of life and salvation in Jesus. We repent of our sins and through faith in Jesus, the Righteous Branch of the house of David, we receive forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Just as Jesus was raised to life, we are raised every day to new life in his name. And one day, just as Jesus was raised from death, we, too, will be raised up from our graves to live in God's presence forever. By faith we live now in his forgiveness. We live to bear fruit for God in our lives, the fruit of love and service to others in Jesus' name. We had fallen, but now we have been raised up!