

Homily for Outdoor Worship Service
August 9, 2009 Moir Park
Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 6:25-29

Psalm 1:1-3

*Blessed are those
who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.*

² *But their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on God's law they meditate day and night.*

³ *They are like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever they do prospers.*

Matthew 6:25-29

²⁵"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life^[a]?"

²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Jesus regularly used illustrations from the natural world, as in this passage from the Sermon on the Mount. Birds of the air...lilies of the field.

It was suggested to me that since we are outside I should use a nature theme for the homily. So I thought we would think together about trees and birds.

The psalmist notes that the person who meditates on the things of God is like a tree planted by the stream which sends down **deep roots** and even in times of drought remains healthy. Well, we know what happens to trees with shallow roots. In a windstorm they are uprooted. To face the challenges of life we need to send down deep roots.

There reportedly is a wild fig tree in South Africa that is only thirty feet tall but has roots over 400 feet deep! In dry areas the successful trees send down deep roots.

Yesterday morning our family left the resort very early after two weeks of vacation. We couldn't do much loading the night before because of the weather and the kids wanted to stay up late because it was the last night with their cousins, but they wanted to get home early which meant getting up early. I also had a short night and made the decision to do about a three-minute morning devotion. That was a mistake. It was a morning that I needed to send down some deep roots that I might remain centered in the midst of the inevitable storm that would arise as we wakened our three teenagers to start packing and loading. But I didn't. I, too, was short-tempered.

Deep roots.

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Sequoia trees. Magnificent giants which grow in a corridor only fifteen miles wide through California. Some are 3500 years old and 300 feet tall. How deep do you suppose their roots are?

Three feet.

That's right. Three feet. How do they keep from falling over in a windstorm? They hold hands. That is, roots. **Their roots intertwine.** You never find an individual sequoia. They grow only in groves. Their interconnectedness provides them strength.

I can't tell you how many times I have been visiting someone in the hospital when they say to me, "Pastor Bill, *what* do people do who don't have a church?!"

I don't know. I can't imagine facing life's crises without the support of the church.

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What about palm trees? Deep roots or shallow? I don't know. I read conflicting data. What I do know is that palm trees rarely break off despite hurricane winds! How come? Two things. First, they shed their leaves in high wind to lessen the effect. And second, they are very flexible. Palm trees can bend all the way to the ground without breaking off.

Yesterday morning I needed to be flexible with my sun and just let the leaves blow away. Instead I stood my ground, with the result that our relationship was broken, for a while. **Flexibility.**

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(I held up a wooden carving.) Anyone know what this is? It's a "Long life man" from China, carved from a bamboo root. (The root hairs form the face's hair and beard.) Bamboo is very interesting. When you start a new bamboo shoot it doesn't grow much at all the first four years. That is, it doesn't grow much *above ground*. It uses those first years to grow roots, a strong foundation. Then the fifth year it might grow as much as fifty feet! Or even ninety!

That is encouraging to me as I evaluate some of my projects. **Be patient.** Lay the groundwork. Trust that it will be fruitful down the road.

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Geese! (This idea came from an article in *Presbyterian Outlook* many years ago.) We've all seen long lines of geese in a giant V winging their way across the sky and we have heard their honking. There are three lessons we might learn from the geese.

First, when they fly in a V, do you know why one line is usually longer than the other?

It has more geese in it.

Scientists tell us that by flying in a V formation the geese can fly 71% farther than a lone goose can fly. Teamwork!

Second. Who leads the formation? It changes. The geese rotate leadership. As we do in the Presbyterian Church. I have had only a few moments of panic since I became your pastor two months ago. One morning a few weeks back I suddenly panicked as I thought, "WHAT am I going to do when Roger Parker goes off session?!!!" After a few seconds I took a deep breath and said, "It's okay. Lots of talented people around here."

It's good that we rotate leadership. We get fresh perspectives. We develop new leaders. It's good.

Third. Ornithologists tell us—and I have NO idea how they know this—that when the geese are honking as they fly across the sky, that what is going on is that we are hearing the geese in the rear honking *encouragement* to the leaders up front. When we are honking from the rear, is it encouragement?

Amen.