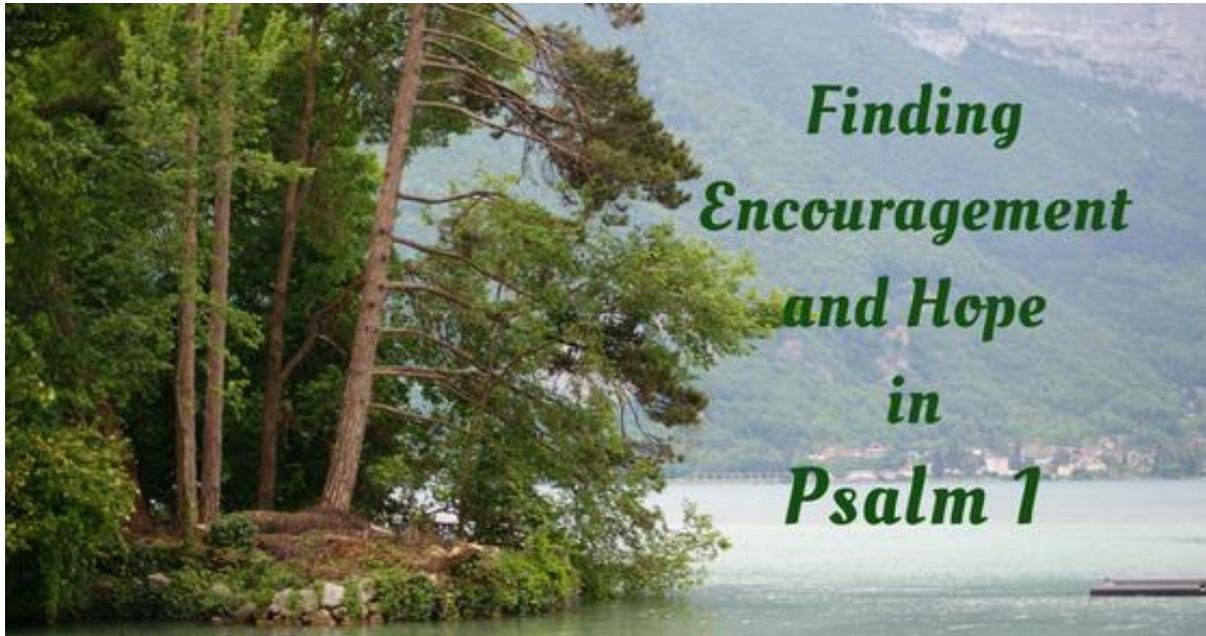


35. Encouragement for the Journey

Sermon – Be Like a Tree



Wednesday, 28th July 2021 – Glenda Bolitho



“Be Like a Tree”

Bible Reading: Psalm 1:1-6

Greeting

Greetings and a very warm welcome from St Luke’s Anglican Church Concord. I’m Glenda Bolitho, a member of the ministry team at St Luke’s and we gather, each in our own home due to Covid restrictions, to read God’s word, to pray for one another, to encourage one another, and to praise our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Before I commence let me pray.

*Almighty God
We thank you for the gift of your Holy Word.
May it be a lantern to our feet,
a light to our paths,
and a strength to our lives.*

*Take us and use us
To love and serve all men
In the power of the Holy Spirit
And in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,*

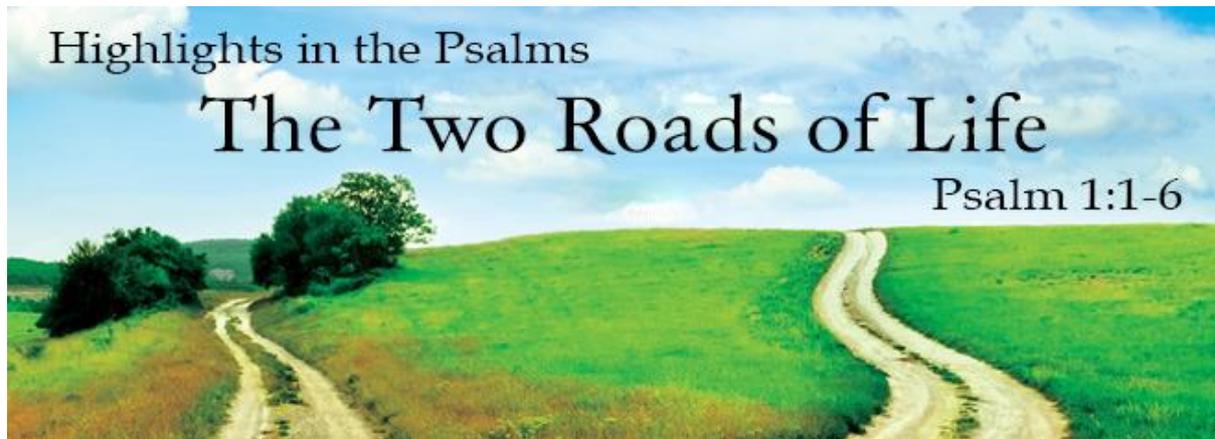
Amen



Introduction

To-day we are turning to the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms begins with one of the simplest yet most profound truths in all the Bible - great joy comes from obeying God and refusing to listen to those who discredit or ridicule him. We find this truth in Psalm 1. Theologian and author, James Montgomery Boice, says, *“The first psalm is among the best known, if not **the** best known, psalm in the entire Psalter, and rightly so, for it stands as a magnificent gateway to this extraordinary ancient collection of Hebrew religious verse”* which I thought to be a beautiful description of Psalm 1 and indeed the entire Psalter.

Two Roads of Life



Montgomery Boice also explains that *“Psalm 1 introduces us to the doctrine of the two ways, which is a very common concept.”* He quotes from the poem *“The Road Not Taken”* by Robert Frost.

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.”*

Boice also quoted a poem about the idea of paths diverging in a wood by Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri, from the Middle Ages, whose divine comedy begins,

*“Midway this life we’re bound upon,
I woke to find myself in a dark wood.
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.”*

Boice continues that *“there are biblical examples too. The most important is the use of the idea by Jesus toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew. The last section of the Sermon on the Mount lists a series of contrasts, between which, choices must be made: two gates and two roads, two trees and their two types of fruit, two houses and two foundations. The part regarding the two ways says, ‘Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a*

few find it' (Mt 7: 13-14). Psalm 1 is the clearest, most carefully developed, and first full expression of this idea in the Bible."

Be Like a Tree

I've titled today's talk "**Be like a Tree**" and we are going to be honing in on verse 3 of Psalm 1 which has just been read to us in our Bible Reading. Let me reiterate a phrase or two from the beginning of the psalm, but especially verse 3.

The psalm says that the man who reveres the Lord and delights in his law shall *"be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."* Psalm 1:3 (NKJV).



Biblical writers often used trees as symbols of God's blessings. Trees are taken for granted in many parts of the world, but in the arid conditions that characterise so much of the Holy Land, trees are

something very special. They bring to an often bleak landscape the dual blessings of beauty and of much needed shade.

Think of the root system that would be required to sustain a plant the size of a tree in a place with so little water. Any tree that manages to survive is soaking up every drop of water that is available to it. Even when a dry spell comes, it survives because its roots are deep.

The Law of the Lord

Back to our psalm – Psalm 1. It is fitting that the Psalter, the Book of Psalms, begins with a discussion of trees. “*Those whose delight is in the law of the Lord*” it tells us, are like healthy trees. This “*law of the Lord*” refers to all of Scripture. In it, God reveals to us his will, his absolute truths, his love for us, and his divine nature. The more we know of the whole scope of God’s Word, the more resources we will have to guide us in our daily decisions. The trees of which the psalmist speaks have been planted along nourishing streams of life-giving water.

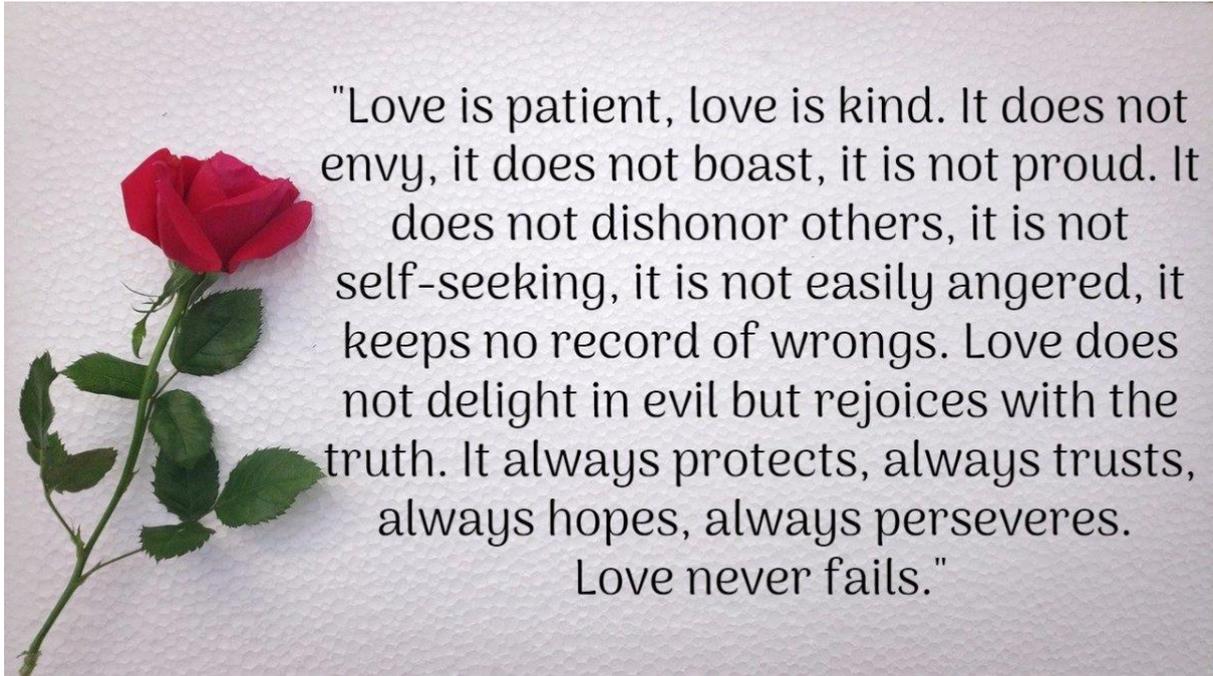
Here the water is a metaphor for the spiritual nourishment to be found in the Bible. The vitality of such trees can be measured by the fruit they produce when they are in season. The prosperity God promises those who daily meditate upon the Scriptures has nothing to do with material wealth. There is no promise here that we will somehow attain a comfortable life. Every healthy tree must somehow learn to withstand the blowing winds of adversity.

We read about this fruit in Galatians 5:22. The Holy Spirit produces one kind of fruit and that fruit is Christlikeness. All the virtues listed in this passage describe the life of the child of God. Let me share this verse with you:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law”.

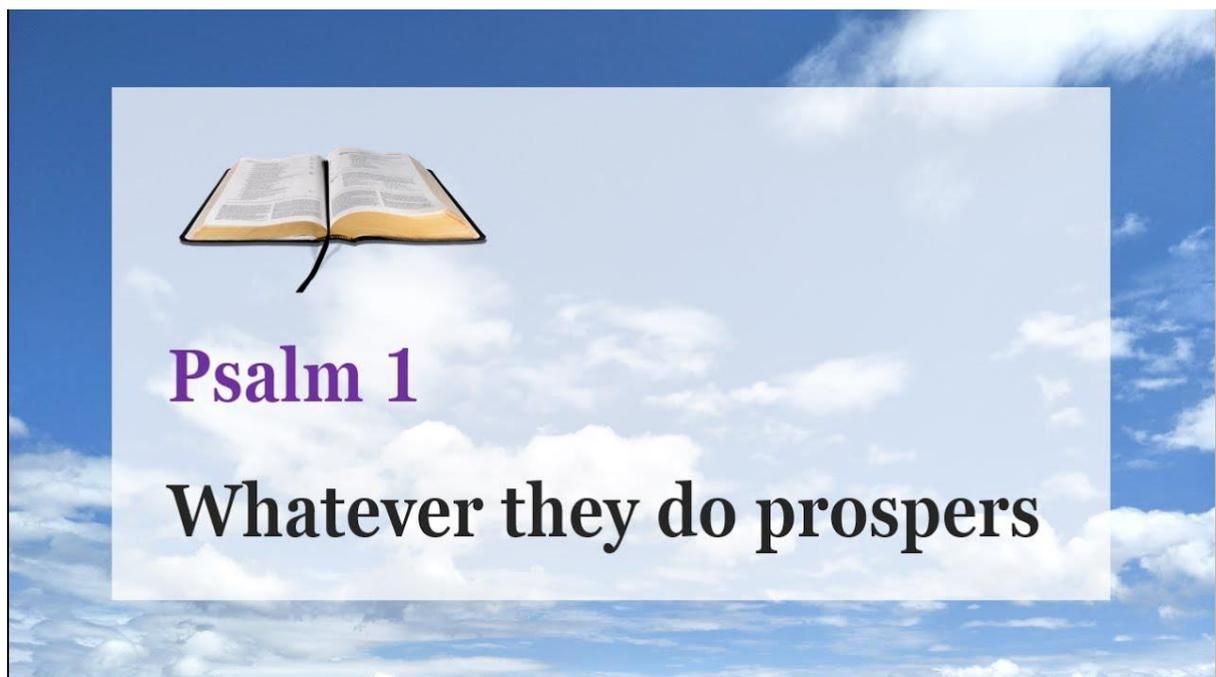


Samuel Chadwick presents the fruits in a different way, in what he calls “*Newspaper English*”. Let me also share this with you, as I thought it a rather lovely and inspiring variation. “*The fruit of the spirit is an affectionate, lovable disposition; a radiant spirit and a cheerful temper; a tranquil mind and a quiet manner; a forbearing patience in provoking circumstances and with trying people; a sympathetic insight and tactful helpfulness; generous judgment and big souled charity; loyalty and reliability under all circumstances; humility that forgets self in the joy of others; in all things self-mastered and self-controlled.*” He concludes, “*How striking this is in relation to 1 Corinthians*” which is of course that well known passage on love ... (“*Love is patient, love is kind, etc*”).



We will achieve true prosperity as we discover the value of God's Word in our lives and meditate on it daily. That fruit, those words and actions, are the result of an intricate root system that provides both nourishment and stability. When you dig into the Word, the Word of God, you are strengthening that network of roots.

Whatever They Do Prospers



The phrase “*Whatever they do prospers*” does not mean that God’s people have immunity from failure or difficulties. Nor does it guarantee health, wealth or happiness. What the Bible means by prosperity is this: when we apply God’s wisdom, the fruit (results or by-products) we bear will be good and will receive God’s approval. Just as a tree soaks up water and bears delicious fruit, we are to soak up God’s Word and produce actions and attitudes that honour him. To achieve anything worthwhile, we must have God’s Word in our hearts.

Something for us to ponder. That little phrase “*in season*” is worth noting - as in the expression “*it is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season*”. Trees don’t bear fruit all year round, only in season. At other times of the year they are dormant, deepening their roots in preparation for the next fruit bearing season. You may feel sometimes as if your life is in a period of dormancy. Be of good cheer. Perhaps this is just a time for you to deepen your roots, drink in God’s Word, and await the arrival of your next fruit-bearing season.

What joy it is to know that God is watching the paths we walk each day. We may feel like he keeps his eye on us in order to criticize us for what we do wrong along the way, but this is not true. God sees us with loving eyes, protecting us, caring for us and keeping us from stumbling on the journey. Look for signs of his care for you today, and bask in the thought that he is guiding and helping you on your daily journey; for in the words of Psalm 121:3-8 we read-

*“He will not let your foot slip-
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber or sleep.*”

*The Lord watches over you-
The Lord is your shade at your right hand;
The sun will not harm you by day,
Nor the moon by night.*

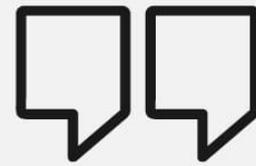
*The Lord will keep you from all harm-
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.”*

AMEN.

Reference Material

Believer's Bible Commentary – William MacDonald
Tyndale Life Application Study Bible (NIV)
Prayers and Promises of the Bible – J. Heyward Rogers and Larry Richards
Psalms Volume 1 – James Montgomery Boice

Message from Archbishop Kanishka Raffel



In the uncertainty of this moment, in the emotional churn of enforced confinement, in the disruption to routine, we have a glorious indestructible hope in Jesus.

Plus, Strength for the Day



The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.

Psalm 121:3-8

Bible Reading

PSALM 1

1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the
righteous;
6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.