

Jeremiah 17:5-8

February 13, 2022

I see trees when I look at you. Trees planted by water. What I do not see are shrubs. Shrubs dwelling in a dry desert. What I'm saying is that you are the ones God calls "blessed," and not the ones He calls "cursed."

Yet I am not able to look into your hearts. The blessed ones are those who trust in the Lord. The cursed ones are those who trust in man and whose hearts are turned away from the Lord. But I am unable to see if your trust is in the Lord or in man. So, how can I be so certain that you are trees and not shrubs, the blessed ones and not the ones who are cursed?

And perhaps there are days when you are not so sure yourself. Days when you feel more cursed than blessed. When it seems like God is against you more than He is for you.

I wonder that myself sometimes. If I really am a tree and not a shrub, why are there days when I do not see much good? He does say in our text that it is the shrub that "*shall not see any good come.*" The tree "*does not fear when heat comes,*" it says. And so why am I fearful at times? The tree "*is not anxious in the year of drought,*" it says. So, why do I become anxious, and worried, and upset?

If you share these thoughts, even just now and then, you are not losing your faith. Rather, you are being honest with yourself. We're humans, you and I. And we have the tendency, therefore, to judge with what our eyes see and our hearts feel. "*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,*" it says here. We do trust in the Lord, but not perfectly. Sometimes we do not feel much trust at all within our hearts. "*Cursed is the man,*" it also says, "*... whose heart turns away from the Lord.*" We don't want to turn away from the Lord. But from what our eyes see and our hearts feel, there are days when we do just that. And still, I say, that when I look at you, I see trees and not shrubs. I see God's blessed ones and not those who are cursed by God.

Both of these Hebrew words are passive participles. *Cursed* and *blessed*. This means that the one who acts is God. He declares, He pronounces who are cursed and who are blessed. It is not left up to us to say who we are. We are passive in this. It is God who acts.

And act He did in Eden. He pronounced the serpent to be cursed because he tempted Adam and Eve into sin. And because they sinned, all people are born under God's curse. The curse of death and eternal judgment looms over everyone born of Adam and Eve. This means that you and I were shrubs at birth, born cursed by God and dwelling in the dry desert of the devil's kingdom.

But no more, my friends, no more. For there is one other Hebrew word in our text that is passive. The word *planted*. Which really should be translated *transplanted*. This is you who trust in the Lord. You are like a tree transplanted by water. And this was God's doing. He acted for you. He transplanted you, once a shrub, but now a tree. And He did this "*by water,*" it says. He transplanted you in the water of Holy Baptism. And so, you send out your "*roots by the stream,*" as it says. The stream of Jesus' blood that flows to you in the Word and Sacraments.

Shrubs don't do that. Shrubs do not have their roots in the Word and Sacraments. Shrubs do not live each day in the cleansing water of their baptism. No wonder their hearts turn away from the Lord. No wonder they trust in man and not in the Lord.

If you doubt who you are, trees or shrubs, then look carefully at Jesus on the tree of the cross. "*Cursed,*" it says, "*is everyone who hangs from a tree.*" He took your place, my friend. He became the One who was cursed by God. The curse of death and eternal judgment that loomed over you, He Himself bore.

Jesus became the shrub that you were as He hung on the tree. And because He did this for you, your leaves remain green no matter how much heat comes into your life, no matter how little good comes to you, no matter how bad is the year of drought for you. Green is the color of eternal life. This life is yours in Christ Jesus. And nothing, not heat, nor lack of good things, nor drought, can change the color of your leaves to brown because God has transplanted you into Jesus.

And what about your fruits? Well, you're not going to find fruits on a shrub; a shrub dwelling in a dry desert. But you are trees, trees which, it says, do not "*cease to bear fruit.*" And it's all because God has transplanted you by the water of baptism. Your roots are in the stream of Jesus' blood. And so, you do bear fruit. The fruits of faith. The fruits of trust in the Lord.

Not perfect fruits, no, because you and I do not have perfect faith. And yet fruits that declare to all around you that you are a tree, God's living tree, rooted in Jesus Christ. Where your fruits are lacking, there is forgiveness for you. Not judgment, forgiveness. Jesus took away your curse, becoming cursed for you. And so, you are forgiven, everyone of you.

And so, live like the trees you are, and not like shrubs. Live as those who are blessed and not cursed. As God's living trees, keep sending out your roots into the stream of Jesus' blood. And your leaves will remain green forever. Amen.