

WELCOMING IN CHRIST
Monthly Devotional Reflections
Anticipating the St. Paul's Anniversary Campaign

JUNE 2018

The Season after Pentecost with the growth and development of the church
St. Paul's celebration of clergy and staff leadership

TEXT:

Ezekiel 17:22-24 *Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.*

REFLECTIONS:

The scripture lessons for the early weeks of the Season after Pentecost introduce us to Samuel, David, Saul, Isaiah, Mary and Elizabeth, Nicodemus, Jesus in Mark's Gospel, and Paul in conversations with the church at Corinth. Each character is a fascinating leader—engaged in God's work, in conversation with God, seeking to be faithful. Take the opportunity to know their stories. Psalm 1 declares that leaders who “delight in the law of the Lord” are “like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season.” The phrase “cedars of Lebanon” occurs again and again throughout scriptures: it is a durable, close-grained wood—excellent for foundations and beams and masts for sailing ships—essential material.

PRAYERS:

As we experience the spirit of Pentecost and the 60th birthday of St. Paul's Church, let us remember the needs of others, offering daily prayers on behalf of God's welcoming community in our church and across the world. Let us give thanks for all who bear responsibilities of leadership. We celebrate the ordained clergy of St. Paul's—present and past—whose faithful ministries of word, sacraments, service, and friendship touch our lives. We pray the blessings of the Holy Spirit to be with all laity who teach, administer, direct, inspire, encourage and help sustain us as effective church members. ***Mighty God, to you belong the mysteries of the universe. You transform shepherds into kings, the smallest seeds into magnificent trees, and hardened hearts into loving ones. Bless us with your life-giving Spirit, re-create us in your image, and shape us to your purposes, through Jesus Christ. Amen.***



ART: Man-made ‘trees’ can provide interesting functions in our modern landscapes like hiding cell towers. This sound sculpture tree catches the invisible, unpredictable wind from all sides to make multiple, fascinating sounds. The wind, of course, is like the Holy Spirit.

How much more complex are the natural trees we enjoy? God creates, plants, starts things—like trees that provide shade for our comfort, fruit for our sustenance, and wood for shelter and warmth.

How are good leaders like trees?

The Singing Ringing Tree (Panopticons) metal freestanding wind-powered sound sculpture.

Mike Tonkin and Anna Liu, 2006, Lancashire, Great Britain

[from the Vanderbilt Divinity School Common Lectionary Resource]

ACTION: Pentecost launched the ideal church with inspired leadership, excitement, joy, faithfulness, and growth. But we know how difficult it is to sustain the perfect community. And as the Christian movement expands the church encounters lots of issues and requires the passionate faith, tireless leadership, organizational skills, and common sense of St. Paul the Apostle.

Church leadership, ordained and lay, involves women and men whose gifts and qualities Paul lists as the “fruits of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. What a splendid person! Most of us don’t have the whole set but, even so, and as we seek God’s grace, God will work effectively in us, through us, and even in spite of us. Who are the church leaders who have mattered most in your life? A childhood Sunday School teacher? A church custodian? A youth counselor? Perhaps a pastor or chaplain? How did they introduce you to Jesus Christ? In what ways did they encourage your discipleship? Might you have the same opportunity and obligation to be a leader now? Take a few minutes to share words of appreciation and encouragement with leaders at St. Paul’s and beyond.