

Psalm 1

Mark 9: 30-37

Revelation 22: 1-5

### **The Hidden Life of Trees**

Ecologist Suzanne Simard has discovered a way trees talk to each other,  
using an underground network of fungi to form tree communities.

She compares them to our human communities, and notes the healthier  
a tree community is, the better its individual trees, just like people.

She says trees are connected below ground by mutualistic fungi called mycorrhizal  
fungi, which serves as a secondary root system, that links tree after tree  
after tree and allows them to send resources back and forth:  
things like carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, water, even defense signals,  
so that trees struggling under stress might receive help.

Which means that trees in a healthy forest *help each other*,

so that each might thrive and flourish and live to its fullest measure.

Or as the Psalmist says, so that each might *be like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither.* (Psalm 1: 3)

She claims that every tree in a forest is connected to every other tree,

and the bigger and older the tree, the more connected it is...

kind of like a Joe Harvard tree; or kind of like a First Presbyterian Church tree!

And she calls these older trees, hub trees, or mother trees because they serve  
to regenerate the young seedlings, or to reinforce struggling seedlings

beneath their canopy of care.

The lesson of the forest is one of resilience, Simard says.

The more connected the trees are; the more diverse and locally adapted

the community is, the better off all its trees are going to be.

(Kleiber, Shannon. *To The Best of Knowledge*. "Listening to the Mother Trees".

[www.ttbook.org/interview/listening-mother-trees](http://www.ttbook.org/interview/listening-mother-trees))

Her thoughts align with those of another forest ranger and author, Peter Wohleben,

(whose name in German means good life) who writes in his book,

*The Hidden Life of Trees*, that trees are social beings, that can count,

learn and remember, nurse sick neighbors, warn each other of danger

by sending electrical signals across that fungal network,

which he calls the Wood Wide Web.

He agrees with Ms. Simard that in nature, trees operate less like individuals

and more like communal beings, working together in networks and

sharing resources to increase their resilience.

(McGrane, Sally. *The New York Times*. "German Forest Ranger Finds that Trees

Have Social Networks, Too. Jan. 29, 2016)

Perhaps we, as people of faith, should learn from the trees of the forest,

what it takes to work together as a community for the healing of the nations.

Perhaps we should take our role as the old hub tree or mother tree more seriously,

as our particular old church supports and regenerates young sapling ministries,

like Step-Up, Durham,

so that their individual tree members (like Peggie and Marilyn)  
might stand tall, and grow strong, healthy, confident, and resilient  
as they are nursed and nurtured back into the Wood Wide Web of  
the working world.

Jesus, you know, was all about restoring people to community; bringing back  
into community those who had been out sick, or away from the table,  
or imprisoned, or mentally or emotionally oppressed,  
or just outside of the norm.

His greatest joy was having them return to a community where they might thrive,  
and where their labor and love might bear fruit, so they might  
be like evergreens, blessed and a blessing to others.

Today's reading from the book of Revelation envisions a city  
of abundance and fecundity, with waters of life as clear as crystal  
feeding the trees, allowing them to produce fruit that will feed  
and heal the nations.

And the Lamb whom we call Jesus will be in that city, providing light for  
his servants and light for his trees to continue the work of his kingdom.

Thanks be to God for the Wood Wide Network which connects First Presbyterian  
Church to Step-Up, Durham, and our other community partners,  
to each individual whom they have helped,  
and to each family that is stronger because of these ties that bind us together.

It is a great joy to be a part of God's life-giving network. Amen.

- Marilyn T. Hedgpeth, Copyright 9/23/2018

### **\*Charge and Benediction**

So, hear these words from Dr. Seuss' book, *The Lorax*, as our charge this morning: "But now," says the Once-ler, "now that you're here, the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." And in that light, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the wood wide network of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.