

You’ve seen them, the posters and t-shirts that say, “Advice from a...bear, a rock, a mountain, a lake. If you go to the nature store at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, you’ll see “Advice from a Tree.” The t-shirt or coffee mug will say: “Stand tall and proud; Go out on a limb; Remember your roots; Drink plenty of water; Be content with your natural beauty; Enjoy the view!”

And that’s good advice as far as it goes, but if you want to go a little deeper, you might want to dig into the Bible. You can’t put it all on a throw pillow or a mouse pad, but you can learn a lot more from trees, and we have a forest of them in the Bible, beginning in the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis.

Lesson One: Last week we read the passage from the first chapter where God creates humankind, and then God says, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.” [Gen 1:29] In the beginning, we had plants and trees and

that was enough. Whether you're a vegetarian or not, that's a message we don't hear nearly often enough.

In Silicon Valley, the majority of us have everything we really need. And the only thing that keeps us from being aware of that is what you might call cultivated greed. You see, our economy depends upon our anxiety, and it has trained us well to keep buying more than we need. If we would rather feel the peace that comes from knowing that we have enough, that we *are* enough, then we need to spend less time shopping and more time with trees.

Lesson Two: This week, we read from the second creation story in Genesis Two. God puts in the center of the Garden of Eden two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. I'm going out on a limb here, but I'm convinced that God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden knowing full well that Adam and Eve would eat of it. God wanted Adam and Eve to have that freedom. Think of it: if Adam and Eve had not taken the bite, had not gained that knowledge, if human

beings had never learned the difference between good and evil, how could we ever choose the good?

I believe that the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil were companion trees in the Garden of Eden. And the lesson they teach us is that if we want to have life, we have to choose the good and reject the evil. That's what we say in our baptismal ritual. We renounce evil and repent of our sin. But we realize that we can't do this on our own, so we accept the freedom and power that God gives us, and we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior and put our whole trust in his grace. Long after our baptism, his grace is what enables us to keep resisting the evil and choosing the good so that life will be great.

Lesson Three: A little later in Genesis, the Lord appears to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. Abraham is sitting at the entrance to his tent during the heat of the day, when three men, representing the Lord, arrive. Abraham gets up and rushes to greet them. He

bows down and says to them, "Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree." [Gen 18:4]

Abraham is just doing what any good host would have done in his day. But today, we are hardly on the lookout for messengers from God coming in the heat of the day, are we? Instead, we leave in the morning with our work blinders on. And throughout the day, we try to block out all distractions, including those occasional godly interruptions. We seldom have time to entertain angels and invite them to rest in the shade a while. But I wonder: what would happen if we scheduled a lunch date with a tree?

The Santa Clara Water District has an outdoor patio on the back of their building by the percolation ponds. It's just a stone's throw from Almaden Expressway, but it's a wonderful little getaway. There are trees and tables there. There's also a labyrinth. Along the paths of this labyrinth, there are etchings of native plants and animals and quotes about the environment. And in the center, a stone with words from *The Lorax*, you know, the one who speaks for

the trees. Hurray for the Water District that lets their employees make a lunch date with a tree!

Finally, Lesson Four: In the Bible, trees are symbols of life and perseverance. Jeremiah says that people who trust in God are like trees planted by streams of living water. They do not fear the heat of the day; their leaves stay green. They are not anxious about the drought because their roots go deep. Even in hard times, they do not cease to bear fruit. [Jer 17:7-8]

The trees in this valley grow by streams. They don't grow where they can't get water. So why do we human beings, who are a lot smarter than trees, consent to live so much of our lives far from the living water that restores our souls? Why do we spend so much time in spiritual deserts without bringing enough water with us to sustain us?

We are very prone to drought here, and that should remind us how spiritually dry we can get living in this valley. The only way to survive is to trust in God by anchoring ourselves with deep roots

that tap into the subterranean streams of God's grace. Then we will not only withstand the drought, but we will bear fruit for others who are dying of thirst.

You see, there is a lot we can learn from the trees in the Bible. Unfortunately, there is no way to find the Garden of Eden, because it never existed in history but only lives in our mythology. Yet we can still find and rest under real trees that can reconnect us to the Tree of Life.

Perhaps that's why it is a tradition in many cultures to plant a tree when a baby is born. When the Oliver family lived next door in what we now call Woodhaven, Ann Oliver and her husband planted a tree for every child that was born into the family. They put a small brass plaque on a rock indicating the year of their birth. Some of those plaques are still there. And when Kristen was born, one of her Jewish relatives sent us a certificate saying that a tree had been planted in Israel in her honor.

Today, we celebrate the baptism of two babies and what better way to do that than by giving their parents a baby tree. Because planting a tree is like raising up a Christian. Both take a lot of faith in the future, a lot of hope in God and a lot of love for God's world.

With my apologies to Dr. Suess, my advice to you parents is this:

Plant some new Christians. Treat them with care.
Give them clean water. And feed them fresh air.
Grow a forest. Protect them from the axes of evil that hack.
Because someday Christ Jesus
and all of his friends
will be back.