

LIVING PLANTED: SESSION ONE

Christian Duty

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, You plant Your people and give them life. Thank You for the gift of life that You have given us in Jesus. We pray that the life we have been given may always be evident in our daily life and work. Amen.

Introduction

Read aloud Psalm 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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

1. What are the two ways of life identified in this Psalm?

What images are used to describe each?

This Psalm says that one walks either in the way of the wicked or the way of the righteous. The wicked are described as chaff that the wind drives away. The righteous are described as trees planted right by life-giving water. The chaff is an image of instability and the tree of stability.

Read aloud Psalm 80:8–11:

“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.”

2. Psalm 80 speaks of God’s people of old being taken out of slavery in Egypt and into new life in the Promised Land. How did they receive this new and blessed life? Who did the planting?

God was the One that saved His people of old out of a slavery in Egypt from which they could not free themselves. He is the One that gave them new life in the Promised Land. He picked them up out of Egypt and transplanted them into the Promised Land. They could not have flourished without His planting.

3. How does this relate to how we receive the new life we have in Christ? Who plants us?

God in Christ saved us from slavery to sin, which we could not escape. In Baptism, He broke that bondage and delivered to us a new life. God always does the planting. He always does the saving. We rejoice that the new life we have does not rest on our work, but His. He plants us by streams of living water. This is the key teaching of all of Christianity, that God alone gives us salvation and new life through Jesus.

4. What is the result of God’s planting us and giving us new life? What does Psalm 1:3 tell us about this new life? What is produced?

This new life we have through Christ is active in our daily work. Our life is lived out in Christ. Since we have been planted graciously by God, as we meditate on God’s ways and live in them, we see fruit produced in our life. It is simply what a healthy tree does. A healthy apple tree produces apples. A healthy child of God produces the fruit of good works that honor God and serve neighbor.

Read aloud Galatians 5:13, 22–23:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

5. Is the freedom from sin that God gives us just meant to benefit us personally? If not, how does this freedom help our neighbor? How do the fruits mentioned in these verses serve our neighbor?

God has freed us from serving sin in order that we might instead serve Him by serving our neighbor. When the fruits this passage mentions are present, not only our lives but our neighbors are blessed. For instance, one member of a family having these fruits in their life can greatly affect the others living in the home.

Read aloud Luke 13:6–7:

“And he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, “Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?”’”

6. Does God hold His people accountable for the production of fruit? Does He expect fruit?

He does. Since He gives everything necessary for such fruit, including planting us in fertile ground (Baptism) and providing us with everything we need to be healthy (Word and Supper), He does expect fruit to grow. He is saddened and angered when He looks for fruit and does not find it in His people. He is patient and forgiving in this regard (waiting even years in the parable to find fruit), but He does expect fruit.

Read aloud Martin Luther’s Evening and Morning Prayers:

Evening Prayer:

“I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

Morning Prayer:

“I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

7. What can these prayers teach us about both how we receive life through Christ and how that life is lived out in Christ? What is the emphasis of each prayer, and why is such an emphasis appropriate for the time of day it is prayed?

While perhaps no one was ever more emphatic about how salvation by grace alone is the central thing to proclaim in the church, Luther rejected the idea that such an emphasis means not talking about the fruit that God expects in the Christian life. We see this in these prayers. The evening prayer reflects on the day that has passed. Therefore, the heart of the prayer is all about seeking forgiveness for sin. There is always sin that remains that needs to be confessed and forgiven. Yet this does not stop us from praying in the morning with confidence in Christ that fruit will come forth in our lives. The morning prayer emphasizes asking God to help us live fruitful lives during the coming day.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, thank You for the life that You give us through Christ. May our lives be found to be full of fruit manifesting Your good work in us and through us. Amen.