

09.06.26 ~ Pentecost 15
“Rooted in Christ: Good Fruit”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Isaiah 61:8-11 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 641

⁸ “For I, the Lord, love justice.

I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering
and make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹ Their descendants will be recognized
and honored among the nations.

Everyone will realize that they are a people
the Lord has blessed.”

¹⁰ I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God!
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.

I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding
or a bride with her jewels.

¹¹ The Sovereign Lord will show his justice to the nations of the world.
Everyone will praise him!

His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring,
with plants springing up everywhere.

Leader: These Are God’s Just Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Matthew 7:15-20 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 840

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. ¹⁶ You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. ¹⁹ So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words of Caution.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we come to you at the beginning of a new season with hope and anticipation. Like children starting the new school year, we too have a quickening in our step when we see summer flowers fading, slightly cooler mornings, and an occasional pop of color on a leaf. We appreciate the harvests of produce and fruit trees. We thank you for our freedom to work, labor, and worship. We dedicate this next week as we recall 9/11 to healing, honoring heroes, reconciliation, and peacebuilding around the world, especially the Middle East. Now, we seek your

instruction through the Scriptures and this message. Speak through this messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Did last week's "cup half empty" or "cup half full" question impact your week at all? I found myself pondering my reactions to circumstances and decisions differently as I contemplated that perspective. I also found that even though I am mostly a "half full" kind of person, when confronted with a challenge, I could drift over to the "half empty" negative response, until I prayed, paused, breathed, and circled back to the positive. It happened with a key situation. Thanks to Roudaina, Carol, Pastor Ed, Pedro, Belynda, and myself, we were able to complete the Food Mission move from Room 121 to Room 123; however, there were locks on the interior doors for which we had no current obvious access. Thanks to Bill and Charles, who sorted through our hundreds of keys representing decades of building changes, the only search I had to do was the upper key box (i.e., the old system). Because previous Pastor Wayne had done an excellent job labeling the old keys that did not change, it was a quick remedy, but I must say my internal "cup half empty" response came first! A bad attitude about this extra search presented itself and I almost gave up; but found the right keys quickly, so Pastor Ed and I were able to make the rooms functional once again. My lesson wasn't about security as much as about keeping an open, hopeful mind when presented with any difficulties, like the people of Isaiah's day who were just returning to a destroyed city. I use my simple story to help you think through the last time you lost your temper about a difficult situation. If we are people of the book and Christ followers, shouldn't we be setting better examples of peace and justice? I realize access to a room or

preventing access to protect goods is not life and death, but it can be these little things like the news, a downed tree, no electricity, or traffic that can shift our moods from finding a hopeful solution to a day of frustration or vulnerable anger. We are human. Let's see what Scripture reveals.

In this latter third of his prophecy, Isaiah writes to comfort his people that after this judgment, they will eventually return to their homeland, Judah, from Babylon. He also foretells of the Messiah (for us it is Jesus) who would come to bring good news to the poor, release for the captives, and to bind up the brokenhearted. We also know that after exile, God's people, the Israelites, have been forgiven and restored in relationship to God, and that the Gentiles were adopted into the historic covenants and now into the new covenant with Jesus. Isaiah too moves from half empty to hopeful half full. The prophet promises prosperity as they return home from captivity. The Lord loves justice for the world and will teach it to them, their children, and their children's children if they obey his commands. From a history of harsh judgments, God promises them hope (a movement from half empty to half full, couldn't we say?) and to treat them fairly.

For their years of suffering, God offers salvation through this Messiah and righteousness through relationship to himself and Jesus. He declares this glorious outcome of forgiveness and restoration is like the joy of a wedding couple--bride and bridegroom dressed in their finest on their happiest day. Those who rejoice in God may do so greatly for he is forever to be praised! He has clothed his people (the church in this case) with bright yet durable garments of righteousness and sanctification. This brilliance should shine out for all to see and desire. Isn't that what we

hope for our own lives and examples, not just for our church? Are we being that brilliance, beauty, and service for the neighborhood, so they know that the church means hope? These blessings shall spring forth like plants in good soil and fruits of the earth for generations to come! Rooted in Christ, let us continue this good work with “half full” mindsets and resources.

Now in the Matthew passage, we are coming toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, which included the Beatitudes of Jesus. After the lessons on how to live in the new kingdom, Jesus warns his disciples about false prophets with faulty messages, disguised as sheep but who are really carnivorous wolves ready to devour believers. Shepherds often wore a sheepskin cloak, blending in with his sheep, but there were also questionable men and thieves who wore the sheepskin but were not trustworthy. This example was to warn the people not to listen to these charlatans.

The fruit and tree metaphors come in here next. One can identify bad trees by thickets and thorns where the fruit may look enticing but is dangerous and perhaps even poisonous. If you’ve ever watched the TV show *Survivor* or any Discover explorer adventure, you’ll have seen how difficult it is to find good fruit in a desolate wilderness. In the Galápagos Islands, there is a deadly fruit called the “little apple of death” from the manzanillo or manchineel tree (*Hippomane mancinella*). Its small, greenish-yellow, apple-like fruit is intensely toxic to humans, causing severe throat swelling, extreme pain, and digestive damage if eaten. Even the sap causes skin blisters and burning. Only the giant Galápagos tortoises on the islands can eat them with no issues. Good, healthy fruit

trees (without thorns) produce unspoiled, good, nutritious, and tasty fruit. Bad, unhealthy, or pest infested trees produce no fruit or bad fruit. Have you ever picked an apple off a tree only to find a worm in it? It may be the most beautiful on the outside, but it is inedible.

The bad trees Jesus says should be cut down and removed. One might assume he was speaking in code about the Pharisees and Sadducees, but no; he was referring to another group of charismatic, false prophets **in the church** whose lives were superficial and poor examples for the flock. It wasn't false teaching like Paul warned about, but rather bad ethics, poor morality, and corrupt character; they took the mantle of prophet within the church only for prestige and had **no** right relationship with God or Jesus. His word "fruits" here means outward actions showing inner motivations, character, and conduct. Their lives do **not** reflect the brilliance of salvation or righteousness of a wedding couple like Isaiah wrote but rather reflect the dim poverty of sin. That sin is the darkness of human ego, arrogance, and greed. They took the position for status, self-promotion, or financial gain. Jesus warns us too about these wolves in sheep's clothing. As Christ followers, we must be authentic, disciplined, and true to living our lives as Jesus taught. **That** is our evangelism.

Another point our photo on the bulletin cover projects is the fact that even good fruit can go bad. While that would be a different sermon, let me leave you with that thought to ponder. Even if the tree is good, healthy, and strong (rooted in Christ, you might say) and produces good fruit, if that fruit is not kept properly, it rots. That fruit can turn bad through inattention, poor air circulation, or being with other rotten fruits. Now use your own wisdom to see how that pertains to our spiritual lives

and practices. Our actions and character reveal our roots, the health of our trunks, and the fruit we'll produce. Do we require a new school year reset, perhaps? How about our church? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us through your Scriptures each week. May we never forget that you have called us into relationship and glory. Help us to stay close to you through your word, your prophets, evangelists, apostles, teachers, and shepherds. Remind us to obey, listen, and serve. Transform our hearts, Lord, so that we may demonstrate your love to others every day in some way. Help us as a church and individuals to produce good fruit; and as we drink the fruit of the vine and wafer representing your blood and body, poured out and broken for our sins, we thank you and ask your blessing on the elements and on us. We remember you on the cross and praise God for your resurrection. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.