

05.10.26 ~ Easter 6 – Mother’s Day
“A Dramatic Storytelling: The Tree that Survived the Winter”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Promise

Psalm 92:12-15 ^{NKJV}

Pew Bible 517

¹² The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³ Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
¹⁵ To declare that the Lord is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Leader: These Are God’s Words of Promise.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 1000

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.
⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance . . . ¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

John 15:5-9, 12-13 ^{NKJV}

Pew Bible 939

⁵ “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Love and Joy Perfected

⁹ “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love . . .

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

Leader: These Are Words of Unconditional Love.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God, you are the comforter, nurturer, and provider of all that we need. We proclaim it because Christ is still risen and present in our lives. Through his sacrifice, we have freedom from all sin, and we perceive what unconditional love feels like. Because of your gift, we worship here today and ask that you inspire and teach us from your

word to be the people you desire us to be -- faithful. May we extend our love to our families, friends, neighbors, and strangers as you taught us to do. May we abide with you, trusting you to help us heal, grow, and be strength for others. Open our hearts and minds to your guidance and direction, as you speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Yesterday was a joyful time here in the Sanctuary with Sopranessence and 65 of its audience fans and supporters gathered to hear a new and fun music program called "Children's Corner" to raise money for the ACCA Child Development Center. I know they raised over \$1,000 before the concert even started! Not only that good news, but there were friends here like Mary Lee DiSpirito, former Mason District Supervisor Penny Gross, James Albright (Chair of Mason District Arts Council and Child Development Center Board member), their staff and leadership, and other ACCA supporters. At least a dozen had never attended one of their concerts here, so we were good hosts to the community! The flowers were given in gratitude for this broad collaboration. All this happened in addition to and after the normal Saturday morning groups meeting here and a successful Food Giveaway. Parkwood Baptist Church Youth Group came again to help with the food mission as both education and service. Church happens all week long!

Happy Mother's Day again! As you heard our Scriptures read, it is clear that Mother's Day is not only a Hallmark holiday, but also it is a day to remember our own mothers, grandmothers, foster or stepmoms, aunts, new mothers, or mother figures. It is also a day to honor you women of the church. Love is the overriding principle in all three passages and will be part of our story, *The Tree that Survived the Winter*, by Mary Fahy. As you listen to this adult fable, written almost like a

children's story, keep in mind that God loves us above all and out of his love, gave us his son Jesus to die for our sins. This story reminds us that no matter the storms, challenges, or life difficulties, we have Christ at the core of our hearts, and his eternal promises define who we are now and who we become. So, let us hear from this Episcopal spiritual director and author in the context of the hymn offering we sang together, *Faith of our Mothers*. And then I'll have a few closing words.

Read directly from the book.

Faith and faithfulness are the characteristic reminders of our tree in the story, the trees in Psalm 92, hopefully in our mothers or mother figures, in the eternal love of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and hopefully in our church. Faith, hope, and love are the enduring qualities of a Christian life, home, and church in today's present time. Although our tree in the story was any normal tree you might have in your yard, the Bible uses tree metaphors and specific varieties, like oak (Isaiah's oaks of righteousness), the tree of life in Genesis, date palms of the oasis, and cedars of Lebanon. Did you know that date palms (not coconut palm trees) are native to the Holy Land and are noted for their gracefulness, fruitfulness, and longevity? The cedars of Lebanon are known for their beauty, strength, and water resistance like those planted in the temple courts so they would be always in the presence of God. The parallel to a mother's grace, strength, beauty, & presence is understood.

Are we like the tree, almost ready to lose heart when faced with struggles like the cold, icy winter she endured but finding inner strength

to sustain us until the next season? Can we trust the creator God to nourish and strengthen our roots and trunk to allow new branches to unfold from our core being and blossom into beautiful leaves, flowers, fruit, comfort, and shade like the tree in the story? We sometimes use “rock” as our metaphor of faith -- solid and unmoving – but I suggest we begin to think of our faith, faithfulness, hope, and love more like the tree in our story or like our mothers, full of life, growth, resilience, some scars, nourishment, deep faith, hope, and love. The tree had several names: Friend, Keeper of Secrets, Hope, Needed, Wanted, Loved, and finally, Faithful. Our mothers are some of those names. Our triune God is all of those names and more. Which ones are you? Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Dear Lord, we love you so much. We thank you for your strength and resilience; we thank you even for the storms that make us stronger. Help us to accept the processes of growth and challenge with grace and love, knowing that you grow us from the inside out when we face these difficult times. As we’ve been studying, you are the cornerstone of our faith and institution, the roots of our tree. We ask for wisdom to stabilize our trunks, and courage to branch out, flower and bear fruit. Let us share Christ’s salvation with others who need you in every season as they weather life’s circumstances. Thank you for this creative way to understand you more. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.