

Sermon:
"Leaves of Grace"

© Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church Wayside/La Plata
Palm Sunday, Year C, Sunday, April 10, 2022

As we have explored trees as guides for our spiritual growth this Lent,
one aspect of trees we haven't looked at is leaves.
And here we are, waving leaves around today as a visible sign of praise.

Leaves have many functions for trees and the various life forms that dwell in them.
For starters, **they are beautiful** – we might say they are the plumage of the tree,
dressing and protecting it.

So we are told to "put on Christ," to wear the garments of righteousness."
Don't forget the very first garment in our sacred story was a fig leaf...
Christ is our covering, our decoration, our beauty, as we wear him into the world.

Leaves provide shade – they make a tree a refuge from the sun.

They help cool the planet. Without them many life forms would die out.
So Christ-followers are called to help cool our planet too,
Providing shade from strife and stress.

Leaves provide **shelter and camouflage**,

a place of refuge for birds and insects and small critters.
How are we called to be a refuge for folks who are burdened with care,
who are marginalized or oppressed, discriminated against or ignored?

Leaves have **healing properties** – the leaves of some trees are have
anti-bacterial and anti-fungal functions, or can strengthen the immune system.
They can be used to treat infections, diabetes, respiratory disorders, joint
inflammation, anxiety and fatigue. Some are used as poultices on wounds.

In Ezekiel we see a vision of a fresh-water river flowing from the temple,
bringing life to all the dead and stagnant places around it.

And we're told there are trees on both sides of that river,

"And their leaves are for healing."

In the book of Revelation that same image returns,

the river of life now flowing from the throne of God –

and now we're told "The leaves are for the healing of the nations."

Jesus was a healing leaf for us, for the world – that's what this whole story we just
heard was, a story of healing of the deepest wound human kind had sustained.

God is in the business of making all things whole, and he did not spare his own son. And now we are to be those leaves of healing for others, for people in our lives, and for the world which continues to suffer from wounds both self-inflicted and created from aggression and a lust for power.

Where and to whom are you being called to be a leaf of healing?

There's one more important function of a leaf I want to explore today:

Leaves fall. They die, and they turn brown or red or orange or yellow, and they fall. They litter the ground. We think they are trash.

They are not trash – they are mulch, they are protection for the soil in winter.

And as they decompose they provide essential ingredients for the forest, not only for the tree they fell from but for all the plants around them.

They lose their life in order to make life for others.

This is the story we just heard in all its bitter detail. This is our story of faith:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Jesus gave himself over to the worst that humankind could do to each other; he endured even estrangement from God, which is what sin causes;

In order that we might have the freedom to walk into life.

If you take away nothing else from this story, know this: It is our source of life.

Life is what is ahead for us, no matter what happens to our bodies.

Our brother Gary Murray died last week; we're not sure from what.

But he said, as he was dying, "Don't worry. Soon I'll have a new life."

Soon I'll have a new life. Once we take in that breathtaking Good News,

and know that what is in store for us is life, we become more willing to let ourselves fall when necessary, to give of ourselves to bring life to others.

Jesus let himself fall and die for us.

And what a new life he made possible for all of creation.

Amen.

18th century poem, Jesus Christ the Apple Tree

*The tree of life my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always green;
The trees of nature fruitless be, Compared with Christ the Apple Tree.*

*His beauty doth all things excel, By faith I know but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see, In Jesus Christ the Appletree.*

*For happiness I long have sought, And pleasure dearly I have bought;
I missed of all but now I see 'Tis found in Christ the Appletree.*

*I'm weary with my former toil - Here I will sit and rest awhile,
Under the shadow I will be, Of Jesus Christ the Appletree.*

*With great delight I'll make my stay, There's none shall fright my soul away;
Among the sons of men I see There's none like Christ the Appletree.*

*I'll sit and eat this fruit divine, It cheers my heart like spirit'al wine;
And now this fruit is sweet to me, That grows on Christ the Appletree.*

*This fruit doth make my soul to thrive, It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be With Jesus Christ the Appletree.*

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.