

November 8, 2020
Rev. Kerry Smith

Psalm 1 Rooted, Growing, Reaching
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 1

UM Hymnal

Happy are those who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God's law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which 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.

I love the story of the beginning of this place. It was November 9, 1941, a month before the tragedy at Pearl Harbor. 26 people gathered at Stonewall Jackson School, now Mockingbird Elementary. Even though a month after that first meeting Pearl Harbor occurred and we entered World War II not long after, all during the war people worshipped and raised money to build this sanctuary. Groundbreaking on this building took place in January 1946, and the first service in this same sanctuary was held on October 27, 1946. I love the resilience of that message. They could have so easily given up, but they didn't. They put one foot in front of the other again and again and again.

Do you remember the economic downtown of 2008? Well, in 2009 this church decided to embark on a fundraising campaign to build Glory Be Fellowship Hall. It was another instance of this church saying that it was going to keep on keeping on, putting one foot in front of the other again and again and again.

We have had wonderful pastors in this church. I reached out to John Thornburg to share some stories about his time here and I want to invite him to share his wonderful memories with you now.

VIDEO

I am so thankful for John Thornburg! I love the story he told about the baptism, people inviting others to come celebrate a joyful occasion, and them falling in love with this community of faith. I also love the story of when there were enough children to do a Christmas pageant. It reminds me of Russell Faulhaber telling me about his Sunday School teacher in 6th grade, Marjorie Meyer. Mrs. Meyer was in UMW, the United Methodist Women, where they were studying Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor and theologian who was arrested and imprisoned for his outspoken opposition to Hitler. Russell was the only student in his 6th grade Sunday School class, and Mrs. Meyer taught him Bonhoeffer one-on-one.

Psalm 1 is our reading for today. I love when we sing our scripture! I love the imagery in this Psalm. Like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in season and their leaves do not wither. We have a lot of trees around us and in our rooted, growing, reaching theme. Apparently a creek used to run right through this land where the sanctuary sits right now.

Psalms, the prayer book of the Bible, the hymnal of ancient Israel, opens with this poem about morality and how we live and make decisions. In the rhythm of life before you start praying or worshipping, the goal is a changed life. Happy are those, blessed are those, who follow God, who listen to God, who pray to God. If you do that, then everything that you do prospers.

When people ask me why Methodists have women preachers, I tell them about John Wesley, the first Methodist. He would preach where the people were, often in open fields. Women started to preach and he was talking with his mom Susanna about these women preachers. Should he stop them? What should he do? His mom asked him if they had fruit. Did

their preaching bring people closer to God? Did people come to faith in Christ because of their words? John said yes, and so there are women preachers in the Methodist Church.

Does our church have fruit? Does our church bring people closer to God? Do people come to faith because of Greenland Hills UMC? For 79 years we can answer yes. If you look at the front of the bulletin it tells you our mission, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We aspire to be disciples who are moving toward being Rooted, and living a life of gratitude and joy. Growing, and living a life of perspective and wisdom. Reaching, and living a life of love. Whatever your age or stage, there is a place for you in this place. All people are welcome and celebrated in this place.

We are a church that shares God's love in concrete ways through outreach activities across our city and the world. This is a place that is constantly asking what good is needed in the world and then finding the way to do it. We value creativity, community, mission, music, and we welcome spiritual questions. In our lives we deal with disappointments, joy, uncertainty, the whole bit, and our mind changes all the time as we learn how Jesus would've dealt with those things. We realize that the questions are more important than the answers. Our faith doesn't have pat answers to those why questions.

The reality that is described in Psalm 1 is centered in God, not ourselves. One of my memories of dating my husband Lee is being at a park in downtown San Antonio. We were in college and I asked him what he wanted out of life. At the wise, old age of 19 I know what I wanted, fame and success and to be important. Lee said that he wanted to be happy. His answer was way better than mine. Happiness is found in being connected to the source of life, God. We do that by focusing on God and the richness of generosity and prayer, the pleasure of service and worship, and the leisure of Sabbath rest and silence in the presence of God.

For 79 years people in this church have partnered with God to be a lighthouse to this community. We strive to be a tree planted by streams of water, which yields fruit in its season and its leaves do not wither. I love the first part of the psalm, but then it starts talking about the wicked. Throughout the Psalms, the writers tell the story of the world where the righteous are attacked and the wicked prosper. We see it in our world today. Too often the bad guys win and the good guys don't. We see it in churches. The churches that are for inclusion and that welcome everyone are doing okay but the churches that condemn and judge are doing great.

When the writer of Psalm 1 talks about wickedness, I think they are talking about autonomy, thinking that someone can do life alone. We think that self-sufficiency is a mark of success, that idea that if you want help or need help either from others or from God, it is a sign of weakness. But, we are not meant to live as isolated selves. Wickedness is when we think that we are doing all right by ourselves, that we don't need help. We are called to make connection with God as the source of life, to trust God, and to trust others. One of the richest times in this church's history was when the churches in East Dallas weren't making it individually on their own, so a partnership was created called the East Dallas Cooperative Parish. John Thornburg talked about it. Churches working together were so much stronger than churches struggling alone.

How can we live lives where we open ourselves up to God's teaching and God's direction? Where we are open to see how God continues to act and be revealed in the lives of people and the life of the world? There are so many people whose lives are transformed because of this place, because of your generosity, because of your commitment to this place being open to all. I remember visiting with the Boy Scout troop that this church sponsors. They were spreading mulch on the playground. I talked with one of the boys who was really curious about

church. Do you mean anyone can come here? Yes! Do you have to dress in a certain way? No. What do people do? We sing songs, we listen to stories about God's love in the Bible, we pray for one another. Why do you do that? Because we are family and you are welcome, anyone is welcome.

It is easy to get discouraged and hopeless in our world today. I'm hopeful because of who you are. All of you show me what radical kindness actually looks like. In this place, you are seen, you are heard, and together we go change the world. We are planted by a stream of living water, so may we spread the fruit of God's love with everyone that we see. Amen.