

Dear Fellow Members of God's Tree of Life,

Do you have a detailed version of your family tree? Have you checked in with a genealogical society to find out how many nationalities are in your background? Have you tested your DNA to find out if you are susceptible to certain diseases?

All these things can be done. Some people think it is essential. Some don't care at all. Some would rather not know if there is a criminal in their family tree, or a tendency to insanity among their relatives.

There is one family tree that is exclusive. It includes only believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't have to take a DNA test to know that we belong. But how blest you are to know that

YOU BELONG TO GOD'S FAMILY TREE

I. This tree has a solid base

There is a reason why Ezekiel uses the tree illustration in our text. The last king to rule in Jerusalem was a man named Zedekiah. He was a descendent of King David, as were all the other kings in Judah. But he was not a good person. He had agreed that Judah would become a vassal state to the king of Babylon. He made a treaty to that effect. Then he proceeded to secretly appeal to Egypt to help him overthrow the Babylonians. When King Nebuchadnezzar found out, he cut down Zedekiah like you would a tree. Then he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God.

Now, through Ezekiel, God is promising the people of Israel a new start. **"I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it."** He would plant that cedar shoot on the mountain heights of Israel. The cedar tree represents the family of King David. In the future, God is promising a new king from David's family. Since that new cedar tree would be on a high mountain, the Lord is telling us that this new king would be visible to the whole world. This splendid cedar is one that will **"bear fruit"** for all the world. This king from David's family is the Messiah.

Jesus, then, is this new solid tree. He is the one who will come to provide a solid base for God's work here on earth. As the Lord says through Ezekiel, **"I the Lord bring down the tall tree, and make the low tree grow tall."** This is what Jesus did. He brought down the haughty Pharisees and put them in their place. They were false teachers who were not working for the Lord. Then he lifted up the common people with a message of hope and forgiveness. He showed them the grace of a loving God.

More than that, the Messiah would do many miracles to show people that he was God. He would teach the people the ways of the Lord as they are written in the Old Testament. He would set an example of perfect behavior which no one can ever match. He did that so that his holiness could be credited to the people who believe in him. But above all, he became the lamb of God who was sacrificed on the cross for the sins of all people.

How refreshing this picture of the new cedar tree is, the picture of God's Messiah. We need him. We have failed our God in every possible way. We have not done what is right in God's eyes. We have pursued sinful behaviors day after day. We should be condemned to hell.

Yet here we are, people who belong to God's family tree. We belong in this family tree only because of God's grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. As the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts, we are God's children. We find shelter in his arms, the branches of that tree. God has been gracious to us beyond our expectation. God has made us his own through his Son, Jesus.

II. Yet, when we consider God's family tree, we have to remember that there are plenty of empty branches. There is plenty of room for more believers. That's why the Lord tells us here, **"Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches."** God's family tree attracts people.

You see, God's family tree can be called by another name: The Holy Christian Church. And the birds that are looking for shelter are all the people in this world who need to know about their Savior. In Revelation, John reminds us that individuals from every tribe, nation, language and people will come to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's what's happening right now.

In the Gospel for today Jesus spoke two simple parables about the Holy Christian Church. The first teaches us that the Church of God is like a plant that grows steadily, even when we are not taking notice of it. The second parable teaches us that the church will grow strong, so strong that there will be room for many. From that strong church there will flow out many fruits of faith, done to the glory of our heavenly Father and of our Savior Jesus.

What is so great about God's family tree? It is that people from all over the world find rest for their souls in our Lord. They find a place where they can hear that their sins are forgiven. They can find the comfort that comes from being baptized children of God. They can find strength to live for Christ through the body and blood of Jesus they receive in the Sacrament. They can find hope for their life here on earth. But more importantly they find hope for eternal life in heaven with their Savior Jesus.

Because there are so many who are not yet part of God's family tree, our church body reaches out with the good news of our Savior. By God's grace, we have found new opportunities to preach the gospel in places we never imagined we could reach. We are helping to train people in places like Vietnam, Pakistan, Ethiopia. We are working in places like Russia and Ecuador where the message of Christ crucified and Christ risen is hardly known. And, of course, we are still planting new churches in our own country where we find so many people without a knowledge of their Savior.

The question is simple: Are we doing our part here at Christ the Rock? Some might say, "Isn't that why we called a new pastor?" Well, here's something we all need to remember. Our new pastor is not some Superman. He is not going to fly in with his red cape to save the day. He is coming to be the shepherd of this flock. He is coming to proclaim God's message, but also to do something else. Paul speaks about that in Ephesians. **"Christ gave pastors to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up."** That's the role of a pastor, to train and equip people for the ministry of our Lord.

So what kind of branch are you in God's family tree? Are you the lazy branch that produces very few fruits of faith for the Lord, or that pushes aside the work of God into someone else's lap? Or are you the eager branch, eager to learn and grow in faith? And also eager to be trained and equipped to share the message of salvation?

There are lots of birds flying around in San Juan county, lots of people who don't yet have a place in God's family tree. And sadly, there are some who have lost their place in God's family tree and need to be restored. You will soon have a leader in your new pastor. I pray that each of you will do all you can to work with him. And may the goal be to attract more birds, more people, to God's family tree. By God's grace you will meet that goal. Amen.