

Sunday March 13, 2022  
First Lesson: Psalm 27  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 13: 31-35  
Sermon Series: Pruning Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are continuing our Lenten sermon series entitled “Pruning Effect;” and as a quick review for those who might be tuning into this sermon series for the very first time;**

- We are using the symbol of a tree, bush, or shrub as the main imagery of this sermon series; where just as the idea of actual pruning, means to trim; as in a tree, shrub, or bush, by cutting away dead or overgrown branches or stems, so that fruitfulness and growth may be increased;
- I am suggesting that there will be times in our own spiritual journey; where the same spiritual pruning process will need to occur, if we wish to bear much fruit in our life journeys;

- Where the process of spiritual pruning in my eyes; involves a time of self- reflection, journaling, prayer, reading of Scripture or other inspirational books that might feed our soul and spirit;
- Another way of spiritual pruning for me that I had not considered, is simply the act of being in fellowship and conversation with one another;
- After meeting with a member for coffee this past Friday, she shared with me an app affiliated with a club called ***Silk+Sonder Guided Self-Care***; that I would describe as an app that is like a ***spa for the soul***; an app designed to tap into your thoughts and feelings and more.
- She also gifted me with this deck of spiritual cards; *101 messages of assurance and truth*; and hand wrote a personal message in this beautiful card; to let me know that she was simply here anytime just to listen.

- The main point of her inviting me to coffee, was simply so that we could be in one another's presence.... **and it was life giving!**
- I was blessed to do a home visit with a member in which she blessed Steve and I with piping hot tea, St. Patrick Day sugar cookies with green sprinkles and just the gift of her presence and fellowship; it gave our souls a much needed respite in the midst of a day full of ministry and business matters.
- Along these same lines, we had another fantastic time of small group discussion on Wednesdays in all of our classes;
- Beginning with the *Journey Through the Bible in a Year Class*, our class was discussing the book of Leviticus.... and it was actually uplifting **if one can believe that;**
- The second class, *Pruning Effect-Applying the Sermon to Life* ; we connected on many levels and

explored these passages of scriptures today that I am about to dive into further... and this process in itself was soul nourishing and soul stirring;

- The Confirmation Class began afterwards, in which we have three students and an adult. There was a time in the class, where the three students ended up teaching myself, Pastor Caity and Alex in ways we were all delighted, intimidated and inspired all at the same time;
- Finally today, we will gather at 2:30 in Fellowship Hall for CLASS 201; a class that will look at what it means to have a closer relationship with God and with others and I mention all of this; to suggest that in every instance and interaction; I personally felt a spiritual pruning of the soul occurring within myself and others around me;
- For it was in being together, we recognized that the process of spiritual pruning was not as daunting or

intimidating or even painful as one might possibly think;

- In fact the process of coming together, set the stage for us all to feel more comfortable with naming some of our goals, aspirations, struggles and more;
- With the goal of each class being; **for us to leave the class better than we began;**
- And how we assessed this, was by doing a spiritual check in like John Wesley; the founder of Methodism would have us all do; where instead of asking one another, *How is it with your Soul,* instead we would all go around in our spaces and ask how we are feeling on the scale of 1-10; and doing the same after each class; with the goal of our number not getting any lower and dare even hoping that our number would increase before it

was all said and done; **so far we have been successful in this goal every time we have met!**

- So I thank you all for your attentiveness in listening to our collective shared experiences; for the act of entering into a spiritual pruning process by the aid of the Holy Spirit is not easy; however I will reiterate it is necessary; if we wish to produce spiritual fruit in our life journeys.
- **And so as we bring our two lessons today of scripture into this conversation, you and I will hopefully see the necessity of spiritual pruning even more so; as I submerge myself into these two stories.**
- For if you remember last time, I shared that there are typically five reasons that an actual tree, bush, or plant would need to be pruned in the first place;
- 1. Dead branches hinder the growth of healthy branches. ...

- 2. For the Prevention and treatment of disease.  
...
- 3. Pruning Encourages fruit production. ...
- 4. Dead branches and overgrowth pose a huge risk. ...
- 5. Pruning Allows you and I to better see our surroundings;
- Where out of the list of these benefits to the actual pruning of a tree, shrub or plant; **we become the tree, shrub or plant in this metaphor;**
- And so in looking a little closer at these five benefits that I have named, I believe that we may find the fifth benefit of actual pruning, being revealed in our two stories today; where hopefully if I exegete these scriptures correctly; we will realize that the act of spiritual pruning; **also allows you and I to better see our surroundings in our every day faith journeys;**

- **And not just better allow us to see** what is going on in our surroundings, but in this awareness, we might be better prepared for what is to come;
- Thereby making our responses to these incidences that much more stronger; that much more wiser — **because the spiritual pruning process** has prepared us;
- **The spiritual pruning process** has informed us;
- **The spiritual pruning process has equipped us;** to be ready for the unexpected;
- **Whether the unexpected** is revealed as a trial, setback, disappointment or blow to the Spirit;
- I stopped by to suggest that when you and I allow ourselves to be spiritually pruned by the Holy Spirit; **we will be ready to handle whatever may come our way;**
- **Another way of looking at what it means to be spiritual pruned** can be paraphrased in Ephesians 6: 13-15; where it says— *put on the full armor of*



*God, so that when the day of evil comes, we may be able to stand our ground, and after we have done everything, to stand; with the belt of truth buckled around our waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, **15** and with our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace;*

- **You see when we do this; when we allow ourselves to be spiritual pruned; the outcome becomes that...You and I will not be blindsided;**
- **The experience becomes that you and I will not be broadsided;**
- **The testimony becomes that you and I will be ready to withstand the test of times....and we can trust in this truth....because you and I still standing..... reveals this truth!**
- For in looking more directly at our first Psalm of 27 first off ; a psalm where some Biblical scholars are not entirely sure that David wrote this entire psalm,

because of the spiritual shift that occurs within this psalm;

- And this is because Verses 1–6 are filled with exuberant confidence; while verses 7–14, while still confident, presents a psalmist that is more subdued and almost plaintive;
- And so for me this shift of David’s spirit does not bother me as much as it may some scholars;
- For in placing this passage of scripture in context with our sermon series; **what I see going on, is the effects of spiritual pruning at work at its finest;**
- So just looking first at verses 1-6 of this psalm; when you and I begin to allow ourselves to be in spaces where our spirits are being pruned, **what begins to occur in my experience—** if we are doing it correctly— is more confidence;

- **What you and I will begin to feel** is more assurance— that we are not alone in our life journey's;
- For when we begin the process of being intentional about pouring into our faith; whether it is in the study of Scripture or even the study of scripture in company and dialogue with other spiritual pruning seekers; **what begins to happen is** similar to if you and I were to for instance, get an exercise partner to walk with or go to the gym with;
- **There is a sense of accountability** that begins to develop within;
- **There is a sense of mutual respect** that begins to develop within;
- **There is a sense of mutual trust** that begins to develop from within;
- For in both instances whether you and I are doing this spiritual pruning process in our personal reflection and study time or with others; **the**

**awareness of the Holy Spirit** becomes more evident;

- **The presence of God's abiding love** becomes more realized;
- **And this in itself** provides assurance;
- **This in itself** could lead someone to proclaim;

The Lord is my light and my salvation;

**whom shall I fear?**

The Lord is the stronghold[a] of my life;

**of whom shall I be afraid?**

**2**

When evildoers assail me

to devour my flesh—

my adversaries and foes—

**they shall stumble and fall; and so on and so**

**on;**

- Then as we jump down to verse 7 of this pericope of scripture, where biblical scholars begin to note a change in David's voice; where it says;

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!*

**8**

*“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”  
Your face, Lord, do I seek.*

**9**

*Do not hide your face from me.  
Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
you who have been my help.  
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
O God of my salvation!*

- For me this shift in David’s countenance is not problematic..on the contrary this shift in David’s demeanor; only affirms the old adage that says ; *as the going get’s tough, the tough get’s going*; where Merriam’s Dictionary would tell us that this phrase means that *when there are problems, strong people work hard to solve them...and so for me... this shift in David’s spirit* represents life...

- **This shift in David's Spirit**, represents the dynamics of the sanctification shuffle that I coined last Sunday;
- That let's us know that **there will be times** when we will feel like we are in the valley— **there will be times** that we will feel like we are sitting on the mountaintop;
- **There will be times** that these two truths can exist in the same day or sometimes even the same moment;
- But this is when I jump back into this pericope of David's testimony in Psalm 27 and echo his words that says;

***I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.***

To state it even plainer; our daughter Ella is currently in double casts from a surgery that will allow her to walk better...but it has been difficult on our family...it has been a strain on our family....but nevertheless, I

**believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living.**

Or the persistence of this pandemic has made  
reintegrating worship and the business of the  
Church that much more challenging...but  
nevertheless, **I believe that I shall see the  
goodness of the Lord**

**in the land of the living.**

And I know that I am not alone in this...many of you,  
I would imagine are going through your own  
challenges, fears and uncertainties...but this is when  
you say to yourself.... **I believe that I shall see the  
goodness of the Lord**

**in the land of the living.**

And then we don't stop there, because the rest of  
the instruction is inviting us to

***Wait for the Lord;***

***be strong, and let your heart take courage;***

***wait for the Lord!***

“For those who wait on the Lord shall renew their **strength**. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

- And oh many of us; myself included do not like to wait for anything...
- But I have learned in my somewhat seasoned life experiences **that often life is more about waiting and preparing, than actually doing;**
- So it is in our wait, where we must allow ourselves to be spiritually pruned; so that at the right place, at the right time, at the right moment, we are ready to respond and act;
- And sometimes our actions **invite us to act justly;**
- Sometimes our actions **invite us to love mercy;**



- But the spiritually pruning process must occur 365 days a week; 24/7...**so that we can walk humbly with God;**
- **And so this is where our gospel comes in; for as I jump fully into the gospel of Luke this morning;**
- Where **Certain Pharisees** warned Jesus that **He had better leave Herod Antipas' territory, before Herod managed to kill Him.**
- **This is how Jesus'** reply was able to be so fearless and forceful in my biblical imagination.
- This is how Jesus **becomes the Rock of My salvation and the Rockstar of my universe;** where Jesus called Herod **that fox** (v. 32)—which was a reference to the crafty, wily character of the kind of ruler he was dealing with;
- Jesus said ...**that fox.....and I am saying it again because I like the way that phrase rolls off my**

**tongue....it's a phrase that makes my soul  
FEEL GOOD.....**

- *GO AND TELL THAT FOX* (ooops I said it again..)  
'Listen I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'
- A phrase that lets us know **that because of Jesus time in the wilderness** where he has enduring his own spiritual pruning process——
- **Because of Jesus time** where although the Enemy or Fox left him there like a tree left without water, sunshine or any kind of nourishment;
- The Infinite Gardener made sure that there were angels all around him; even though the fox left him there to die (Matthew 4:11)
- You see I also learned in life that there are a lot of foxes out there and a lot of fox situations out there;
- In life most of our time and energy needs to be spent on identifying who and what those foxes look

like so that we don't get sidetracked; so that our mission and purpose of sharing God's love and light is not that much delayed;

- For there are foxes in our churches, foxes in our businesses, foxes in our families, foxes in our comings and goings,
- So if you and I don't allow ourselves to be spiritually pruned by the Holy Spirit, we will not be able to see the fox; in fact we will be metaphorically like that a tree what was left without water, sunshine or any kind of nourishment!
- However, Jesus shows us what it looks like to spot the fox before the fox even knows he is coming; the result is found in the conclusion of our gospel where you and I see the soon to be Risen Savior able to testify to his enemy Herod; the fox in verse 35 of our gospel; **“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”**

- **And I want you to take mental note that Jesus said all of this knowing** what his earthly fate was about to be in Jerusalem;
  - **Jesus said all of this knowing;** that he was getting ready to go to the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it (v34);
  - However Jesus was spiritually pruned in that garden and as a result He was able to see what was coming next in the midst of his surroundings;
  - Revealing to Jesus that ***death would not have the final say;***
  - I stopped by to say that spiritual death will not have the final say in the ministry we are striving to build here at First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE;
  - For death is not an option.... the Church will live on;
- “Where, O death, is your victory?  
Where, O death, is your sting?”***

***56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

- **May the Words of this vessel's mouth and all of the thoughts of peace, mercy, love, justice and joy that undergirds our collective hearts and efforts; be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord our Rock, Our Sustainer, Our Redeemer!**

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