

Blessed!©

Jeremiah 17:5-8; Philippians 1:2-11

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As you can see, I kept the tree that Laura Parker designed in memory of Christine Cook. I just felt it is such a meaningful symbol of Chris's ministry and faith as she worked among us in this congregation to plant seeds and to produce fruits.

In case you were not able to come to the service on Tuesday and did not hear about the tree, I especially wanted you to see it and know what it means. Laura based the design on the Jeremiah text – particularly verses 7 and 8. Jeremiah says:

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

This rock and water represent the stream. The picture you see is one Laura sent of a river she was thinking of when she designed this. I love the rivers in Tennessee, which is where this is.

So, there is rock and there is water that runs over the rock – I think of Living Water when I see it. And Jesus said, "I am the Living Water. If you drink from this water, you will never be thirsty."

Jeremiah says those who trust in the Lord are like trees who are planted beside the water. They are nurtured and nourished and they flourish and grow; they are healthy and beautiful and they bear much fruit. In fact, they never cease to bear fruit. Even in drought their leaves stay green.

In this symbolic design, the water and rock represent our Lord – the Living Water; our Rock and our Refuge.

The tree represents our beautiful friend, Christine. In all things, she put her trust in the Lord. And Jeremiah says those who trust in the Lord are blessed.

Think about all the people who were touched by this child of God who trusted the Lord so much that she gave her time and her talents and her love so that others would be blessed as well.

On the branches of the tree we have hands of all sizes: little tiny, month old hands, hands of children all different ages. We have hands that are from 18-year-old's. These hands are from the children whose lives Christine touched as she led and taught Sunday School and Advent Fairs and Family Fun Fairs and activities for the children at Congregational Retreats.

We have many children who have come to know about the Bible and about Jesus; about God's love for them because of Christ – the tree whose roots were fed by Living Waters.

And those children are already reaching their own roots into the waters and are bearing fruit in many ways as well. Some are leaders in Young Life and some are just living life as witnesses to what God has done through Jesus.

You see? This beautiful tree never ceases to bear fruit. The fruit has already become ripe and is already spreading its seed into other fertile land. The fruits of our labor live on and on and never die.

This is a beautiful symbol of our beloved, isn't it? But the truth is, it is a symbol of all of us who are putting our trust in the Lord. It is a symbol of how our lives should look as we draw our strength – our life – our very breath from the Living Waters of Jesus.

Blessed are all who put their trust in the Lord. It is vital to us that we keep our roots healthy and strong in the waters of life – in the knowledge and the love of God, our Creator.

It is so important for us to be thinking about this, particularly as we are about to begin this new season with fall approaching and our opportunities for ministry – for sharing our faith – increasing. One way that we can plant those seeds and bear fruit is by helping with the children.

At the moment, it appears that we don't have the children of the age where we have regular Sunday School classes. (Although, that could change in a flash, if God sends us some, right?)

But we have several little ones who still go to the nursery and who need adults to help them learn and grow. Eric, our nursery attendant needs us to be there with him and to help with their learning. We need for you to be willing to take a turn in the nursery, to enjoy and love those little ones and to show them how much you love God; to pass that love on.

There are also opportunities and great need for you to help with our teens. They are at that important crossroads in their lives where they need role models and especially people who are willing to just be there and love them and have fun with them, but to model your love for Christ.

But even just to serve on a ministry team is important. The ministries we do in this church – the Baby Pantry; Friends with Needs; our Outreach ministries; reaching out to those who are homebound or sick – there are so many ways that we can bear fruit by sharing our love and our faith with others.

I want you to consider the ways that you are bearing fruit that never ceases. How strong are your roots of faith? What are you doing to strengthen those roots? Is there something you haven't ventured out to do, but have thought about doing? Maybe now is the time!

But, even as you consider ways that you can bear more fruit and be stronger as that tree, I want you to know that when I read this passage from Philippians – this letter that sounds so much like a love letter to from Paul to the little congregation in Philippi, my heart overflowed with love for you.

I've thought so much about you all this week; about your sorrow and grief and how you rose to the occasion with so much love and energy to make that time be the best it could be; to lift up one another and to show hospitality to so many guests.

And my heart soared as I read this letter and I wanted you to know that I feel that way too – about you.

“I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

Blessed! Blessed are those who trust in God. Christine was blessed and she was a blessing. You trust God. You are blessed and you are all a blessing!

Blessed. I am blessed for many reasons. And you are all, my little congregation – one of those reasons.

Thanks be to God for the call he has given to us to be the congregation here at Holly Presbyterian Church in this time and place so that we might bear fruit and be blessed.

Amen.

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