

God at Work

Psalm 1 & James 5:7-11

April 11, 2021

First Presbyterian, Luling

We were talking about this last week before we got started with church, and I've been thinking about it ever since I read the information: how our trees did or did not survive the big cold snap. We might look at some of our plants and trees and decide they were dead, never coming back, time to pull them up or cut them down. And that may have been right. Or we may have decided to give them a little more time, whether that was intentional or just from our own lack of motivation to get out there and pull them up or cut them down. But I would suspect that by now, we're pretty sure that the dead ones are dead. But not so fast.

The Texas chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture held a meeting at A&M recently. Tree experts from all over the state. They had some general advice: "Wait till July 4th to fully assess the tree." July 4th? I was definitely assessing our trees by the end of February. Hm. I kept reading. Palm trees may be gone. Oaks: do nothing. Cedar elms may be late. Ok, we have oaks and elms. That sounded ok. Crepe myrtles. Now this I was interested in. We have four of them. Three had leafed out, but the fourth was looking completely dead. Just sitting there, doing nothing. The biggest one. These tree experts said Crepe myrtles "may not bloom this year and may not leaf out till August." August? Wow! That's six months after the storm. The tree people continued, "Be patient. After August, assess the tree. If there are no leaves, cut it to the ground and let it come back from the roots."

Be patient. Let it come back from the roots, if necessary. That seemed wise, if difficult to do. I don't want to wait till August, with my tree that you can see from the road looking dead. And I sure don't want to have to cut it down all the way to the ground. It's taller than the second floor windows.

Obviously, those pieces of advice stuck with me so much because they are something I, and we, need to hear and take in. About more than trees, of course. I want to look at those two pieces of advice, pairing a Scripture with each piece.

Be patient. The James passage tells us this, along with all kinds of other places in Scripture, both using those exact words: "be patient" and by giving us examples of those who were faithful in their patience and patient in their faithfulness. James frames it not in terms of trees but in terms of crops. Several of

you have gardens this year, and the Smith family garden plot is doing moderately well. James says, be patient like the farmers are patient. Wait for both the early and the late rains. Don't give up before you need to. He's making this comparison to encourage his audience to be patient and show endurance as they wait for the second coming of Jesus. They were losing patience, because they had thought that would happen soon. Be patient, don't give up until the late rains. Even when you think something should have happened already—the trees should have already leafed out, the apology phone call should have already have been placed, the prayer should have already been answered—even when those things haven't happened, James says, the tree experts say, the trees themselves say, be patient. Wait. Deep inside, something is happening, something is moving and growing. Be patient.

The tree experts say be patient till August, and then if the tree still appears to be dead, cut it down to the ground and let it sprout from the roots, which are apparently, not dead. They seem sure of this. Psalm 1 reminds us of the value of being planted with deep roots, by streams of water, so that the tree can be continually nourished from underneath the ground. We easily see this in our own landscape, where pecan trees grow best in river bottoms, where their deep roots get water from underground, where we can't see. In our lives, deep down inside, when we are planted near streams of water that flow with worship and scripture and companions in the faith, our spirits are being nourished, even when we can't see or feel it.

Be patient. Something is happening, deep down inside, invisible to human perception. Be patient. God is at work.

If we can wait six months to see if a tree is alive, to wait and look at it closely, observe it hopefully, to see if it's going to grow, then surely we can wait a while to see what God is doing, deep down where we can't see. Surely we can be as patient with ourselves as we are with trees? Surely we can be as patient with others as we are with trees?

I fully admit I have no idea what's happening inside the plants and trees, as they recover, or don't recover, from the freezing weather. I don't know what's happening deep inside those cells and parts of cells. But I can trust that something is happening, even if I can't see it or perceive it in any way. I can trust that God is at work. I can be patient.

Can we make that same admission. Can we admit that we have no idea what might be going on inside another person, or even inside ourselves, as we recover from hurt feelings or broken relationships. We don't know what's

happening deep down, where God is at work within each of us, and between us. We don't know what God is doing in our own lives, in the lives of our loved ones, in the lives of our communities and churches. But we can trust that God is at work, that God is doing something. And we need to be patient, in order to see what that is.