

## PSALM 1:1-6

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 15-17, 2024

Smith

### THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, <sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.**

**<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.**

**<sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**

**<sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.**

When you hear a song, or see a movie, what is it that you remember when it's done? For a lot of people-- and this might not be you-- but for a lot of people, the biggest thing when it's all over is a feeling. I liked that song; I want to hear it again. Or: That movie taught me something, and I want to talk about it. Now, when we're talking about a Psalm, this is also true, except that everything in the Bible-- every word, every syllable, every paragraph-- is true and for your benefit. To hear the Word of God spoken aloud is to sit at the feet of Jesus himself, teaching, instructing, coaching, coaxing, and inviting us to change how we live; and to change how we see ourselves in this world that he made for our benefit.

Here in the first Psalm, I hope that you will notice what the Holy Spirit is telling you about yourself. In the image-- almost a parable; in fact, the center of this Psalm could be called "The Parable of the Planted Tree"-- but in this earthly comparison with a heavenly meaning, the believer (you) is compared to a tree that has been planted. A tree doesn't plant itself. Even wild trees in unclaimed forests are not planted by themselves, but by acts of God through nature, as acorns or pinecones fall, or maple seeds are carried by squirrels or just by the breeze. But God is one who planted you. And he chose just where he wanted you to be.

And in the same verse, the same comparison, he tells us something we ought to remember forever: We are planted by God next to streams of water. The word for stream in Hebrew is *peleg*, which is a man-made stream like an irrigation canal. In other words, not only did God choose where he wanted you to be, and when, for that matter, he also brought everything you need to survive and thrive right into your life. For the water here in the earthly application is everything we need to live: all of the blessings God gives us: family and home, clothes and car, jobs and silly dad-jokes. But it also means the living water of the Gospel. You have been

baptized and brought to faith, the Lord's Supper and the word of God are held out to you week by week.

I get to study the word of God for hours-- hours-- every single day, and of course you don't have that luxury, but here for an hour or two on the weekend, Saturday (Monday) night or Sunday morning, you can be filled with the living water of the Gospel of the Forgiveness of sins, if only you will *not remove your roots from that water*. "Let us not give up meeting together," one Epistle says, "as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as we see the Day approaching."<sup>1</sup>

Listen to the other ways God blesses you as you live for him, grow in his word, and serve him with your life: You will produce fruit. Your leaves will not wither. Whatever you do will prosper! And of you haven't felt very prosperous for a while, have you taken a look at your life? You could go all the way back to your baptism: I am a forgiven child of God! That water was the first trickle of the stream he keeps blessing me with even today! Remember that even baptism is an application of the Word of God, because it's one of the Means of Grace, the ways God brings his grace and blessings to us. But without the word of God, baptism is nothing but a bath. But with the word of God, baptism washed away your sins, and still shows you now that your sins are washed away and you are planted by God with his gracious Water of Life tickling your toes and cooling the sweat of your brow even in the heat of your life's day.

But the Psalm talks about sin, and that's a help to us today. The sin in the Psalm seems general and not clear. The believer is reminded that believers don't try to behave like sinners, even to fit in. They don't walk in the wicked man's steps, going along the path of sin. Believers don't stand in the way, or along the wayside, that sinners take. The believer doesn't intentionally put himself into the life of sinners as if he thinks he'll be strong enough to resist temptation; as if they devil won't notice a believer lurking in the shadows where sinners usually hang out. And the believer won't sit in the company of mockers-- when unbelievers get together, they often feel that it's necessary to mock God or the godly, as if to say, "I'm not a hypocrite like they are." A Christian who shares that kind of company will either fall into the sin himself, or just by association make all of those unbelievers think, "See, he agrees with us. We must be right."

All of their mockery, sin, and wickedness is answered by the Word of God. All of their inner doubts and questions are answered by the Word of God. When we simply humble ourselves

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:25

to the Word and let it reign over our thoughts and opinions, it answers us, it quiets us. It comforts us.

But the wicked? The sinner? He will be like chaff, the stubble, the grass clippings that get burned in the fire. The sinner cannot survive judgment day: He will be judged and condemned. And that would have been our judgment, too, without faith in Jesus.

What are we, apart from the love of God and mercy? The devil would like to wring us out like a dishrag so that every drop of faith and trust is lost, and so that what remains is dry, musty old thing that is useless and hardly even fit to be thrown away. The devil wants us to give up on Christ, to let go of Jesus, and to try to stand on our own reason or strength-- just to what; to get along better with the world? Does the world want to get along better with you? The world wants you to think that being more inclusive and open to what used to be considered sins is better for everyone. The world is telling, as the bottom line, that it will like you better if you embrace sin as your life's pattern and path.

“Come and walk in step with the wicked! Come and stand in the way that sinners take!”  
Come and sit in the company of mockers!” This is the message that you and I get every day. This is the message that our children get every hour.

God forgive us when we are tempted to give in. Temptations like these, that turn the heart directly away from the word of God and the promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, are the most dangerous traps that the devil sets. These are disguised as if they are temptations to lesser things. No big deal! I can handle it! I can act this way with my friends on Friday and still worship in church on Sunday. But the more that the world and some of our friends or co-workers steer our hearts away from the Sacred Scriptures, away from the authority of the Bible and from the clear word of Truth, the more we will begin not to just walk or act like the wicked and like the unbeliever, but to begin to question whether or not we believe. And then the devil has caught the Christian in an ugly, dangerous trap.

But Jesus offers us his own hand, his own bleeding hands and feet, to pull us back and out of the trap. Meditate on that miracle of forgiveness both day and night. You and I are forgiven even our temptations and our doubts. And knowing this sets us back on the narrow road, the hard road, yes, but the road paved by Christ for us. And the Lord of our Forgiveness watches over that way, the way of the righteous.

He had made us righteous. Our deeds, the things we do, do not make us righteous, but we are righteous on account of Jesus. But your faith in him. God grant all this for Jesus' sake.  
Amen.