

Trees and the Fruit They Bear

Revelation 22, Genesis 2 & Psalm 1



Introduction For Stewardship Sunday 2025:

We chose "Trees and the Fruit They Bear" for our 2025 Stewardship Sunday theme. There are several references in scripture to both topics which carry great symbolism that can be used within your worship setting. We highlight three scriptures during the flow of the service. Revelation 22 is the call to worship, Genesis 2 is a focus text for the sermon, and Psalm 1 is referenced at the conclusion. Feel free to explore and expand on these texts as you take this outline and make it your own.

Below you will find a call to worship, invocation, hymn suggestions, children's story, sermon outline, offering prayer and benediction. Include your own hymns and chorus selections throughout the order of worship as fits the preference of your congregation. May your church be as blessed in your presentation of this worship service as we were in bringing these resources to you.

Opening

Good morning and welcome to all. This is service of worship, focused on God our Creator. We also celebrate the fact that we are here to fellowship with another as members of God's family.

To worship means to consider that which has ultimate worth. Today is an opportunity to bless God and to be affirmed in who we are and to offer that affirmation to others as stewards of God's grace (1 Peter 4:10).

Come, now is the time to worship!



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Call to worship: Revelation 22:1-5

Leader: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

All: On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.

Leader: But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

All: And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Invocation

Come and gather beneath the tree of life.

Root of wisdom, branch of peace,

Fruit of healing and release.

Come and gather beneath the tree of life.

Hymns and choruses

- This is My Father's World
- How Great Thou Art

A children's story:

I enjoy telling children's stories. In part because of the responses that come from adults who are listening in. The following parable has multiple layers to it which will be heard as challenge by some and conviction by others.

God visited a man one day and gave him 10 apples.

- Three for the man to trade for shelter.
- Three for the man to trade for food.
- Three for the man to trade for clothing.
- One for the man to give back to God as an offering of gratitude.

The man went and traded three for shelter, and three for food and three for clothing. When he held the last apple, it seemed to be the biggest and juiciest looking of the 10. And he was so hungry. So, he took a bite of the 10th apple... and then another, and another, until all that was left was the core. And with hesitation, he approached God and gave back to God the core...

Questions to ask:

- How do you think this made God feel?
- How did the man feel?
- What is one message this story leaves with you?

Hymn

- In the Bulb There is a flower

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 2:4-7; Psalm 1:1-3

Sermon: Trees and the Fruit They Bear.

Introduction

There is a wonderful story entitled “Honi and the Carob Tree” found in the Talmud, a Jewish book of wise sayings and lessons for life. Following is a version of this story that was adapted by Peninnah Schram

One day, Honi was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, “How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seventy years.”

Honi then asked the man, “And do you think you will live another 70 years and eat the fruit of this tree?” The man answered, “Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees that had been planted by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat and enjoy the fruit of these trees.”

Lessons from trees

The image of the tree is a prominent theme in scripture. We read about it in Genesis 2:4-7, later in Psalm 1:1-3 and at the end of the Bible in Revelation 22:1-5. There are also many stories for children and adults alike that make comparisons between the life of faith and the symbolism of trees and fruit and God’s great care and love for His people. The two stories about the 10 apples and Honi and the carob tree are great examples of the lessons we can share about trees and God’s generous nature.

(Feel free to expand here on lessons from Honi and what he learned from the elder man about generosity and stewardship.)

Consider a few valuable attributes about trees: They...

- Provide shelter and food for wildlife and humans,
- Release oxygen into the air,
- Release moisture into the air,
- Reduce air pollution,
- Block winter winds and reduce heating costs,
- Create a warm and welcoming neighborhood atmosphere, and
- Receive from the world around them and give back in return.

The Tree of Life, which is described so beautifully in Genesis 2 and Revelation 22 is a universal symbol found in many traditions. It symbolizes important virtues, including generosity, wisdom, protection, strength, bounty, beauty and redemption.

This tree is symbolic of God as Creator. As the tree sustains creation with its abundant fruit, protection and regeneration, it lives out its role as part of the created order.

The tree can also represent human **community**. As individuals we develop connections with other people and are better able to strengthen our core and we also branch out to a wider vision of life as we grow within community.

The tree provides **shelter**. It reaches skyward. It loses its leaves and grows new ones. Trees bear fruit. With nurture and care, a tree lives for generations. But like all living things it has its life cycle and one day dies. But even in death it gives back to the soil that nurtured it and embraced its roots.

A tree also **bears seeds** and fruits, representing continuous regeneration making way for future generations of trees.

In Genesis 2 there are three trees described as taking up residence in the garden:

“And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9).

1. **Trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food: Food & Aesthetics**
2. **The Tree of Life**
3. **The Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil**

For some reason we have only focused on the third – the one with forbidden fruit. What would have happened if Eve and Adam would have eaten only from the other two? Why is it we pursue what is forbidden when there are so many other good options? We pretend to know all and act as if we can get by on our own.

But people, like trees, need a community – an ecosystem to feed us and help us prosper. People too need the warmth of sun and the good soil to grow strong and to thrive.

Another unmistakable symbol and lesson we learn from trees is the importance of being generous. We have been created to not only to store up for our own future needs but to give back for the good of others and as a reflection of being created in the image of a generous God.

A powerful book has been written about the power of giving back entitled, “Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don’t Give Away More Money,” by Michael Emerson and Patricia Snell.

Here are some statistics from a study reviewed in the book:

- Twenty percent of American Christians give nothing to the church.
- The vast majority of American Christians give on average 2.9%.
- Only 12% of Protestants and 4% of Catholics tithe.
- The most generous 5% give over half (59.6%) of all contributions.
- Higher-income American Christians give less as a percentage of household income than poorer American Christians.
- As personal disposable income quadrupled in the U.S., the percentage donated by American Christians has declined.

Here’s what the authors offer as their interpretation of their data.

1. Few committed Christians have taken the time to study the theological tradition of their church regarding the subject of wealth and generosity.
2. Churches have grown content with the status quo and hold to low expectations for giving and therefore provide little training about generosity. As long as the church receives enough to pay the bills, the silence remains.
3. Leaders can resist stirring the waters by bringing up the subject of giving as a practice of Christian discipleship.
4. Many Christians give only on occasion, rather than in a disciplined, planned and thoughtful way.

(Make this personal and practical: Take time here to add additional illustrations of how your congregation has done well with training and modeling generosity as well as ways it might be challenged and stretched to do more and to take personal giving to new levels. What are current needs that could be identified as worthy of additional attention?)

Consider asking someone from the congregation to share a story of a life experience that challenged them to greater levels of generosity and the joy that can come from sharing with others, even when it requires sacrifice.)

Conclusion

The children's lesson shared this morning – about the man & 10 apples – is a simple and clear reminder that we have received from God all that we need to grow and flourish, and we, in turn, are invited to give back to God as an act of gratitude.

The words from Psalm 1 call on all who delight in the Lord to be like a tree that is planted by streams of water. We are called to yield or to give fruit back to God and others. Blessed is that person who ... is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season (Psalm 1:1-3, paraphrase).

Sending Hymn

- All Good Gifts Around Us

Offertory prayer

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, we offer ourselves as channels of your love, compassion and truth. Impart a spirit of generosity, compassion and love to those entrusted to our care. May our words and actions reflect your grace, inspiring those gathered here to experience the transformative power of your love through generous giving.

Benediction

Send us forth now with a renewed vision of all that you have saved us from and saved us for. Guide us as we strive to be good stewards of your abundance, and caretakers of all you have entrusted to us. With thankful hearts we commit ourselves to bear witness to the fact that all good gifts come from you. In Jesus Christ's name we pray, Amen.



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