

Communion Service - A Tree Planted by Water

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[0 : 0 0] Can we just look back for a little while this evening at Jeremiah chapter 17 and especially the little section from verse 7 which gives a picture of really a person of faith and it says blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him they will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes its leaves are always green it has no worries in the year of drought and never fails to bear fruit I think the Bible always when we read God's living word we see it as God's living word it always pierces into our lives with the question who are you it's always asking that who are you who are you in yourself and because it's that it's God's word it's God's revelation and God looks into our hearts so in a sense it's always asking that question who are we and it's not God isn't so interested in our public persona although he is to a degree or for the younger people your public profile on social media because we can say what we want in a sense and we we project what we want to project on social media we also do that all of us and we all project something of a public persona and it can be easy therefore to project that onto everyone else and forget actually what we are really like and what God sees of us in our hearts and that's really always what

God wants to do he wants to look into our hearts because he sees what our hearts are like and this chapter in verse 9 reminds us that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure who can understand it and he wants us to be reminded of that because that's what drives us to Jesus Christ that's always what drives us to seek salvation because it's not what we're like on the outside it's not our popularity it's not our success it's not our wealth it's not our health it's none of these things that God ultimately is interested in because he sees the condition of our heart and our need for Jesus Christ and in being brutally honest with ourselves and coming to Christ for cleansing and forgiveness is really significant otherwise we'll struggle because our foundation isn't in the right place and it's hard enough being a Christian if we're trying to just have an outward persona of what is involved because to be a Christian today is not to be popular and it's not to be significant and it's not a life if we use that word a life choice that people will make because to be a Christian is to go against what everyone else is thinking and believing and so we need to have been changed from the inside out we can't just be Christians on the outside we might look like Christians in the church we might act like Christians in the way we think but we need Jesus Christ to transform our hearts if we are going to maintain our Christian life and what in in the world but but also in the church you know the church can be a tough place a lot of judgment can go on the church on the basis of just what we're like on the outside we can cover up a lot of what we are feeling or experiencing in our own hearts and we can simply try and put on a good face and impress because we're struggling but God isn't really interested at that level in our our public profile or a outward identity he's much more concerned about our character our inner character what we are like in our hearts and on the inside and that is the key truth of the gospel is that Jesus Christ came to change us from the inside out because he sees our hearts and he sees our sin and he sees a rebellion and he sees that we are dying inside and outside without himself and that he is the only answer to that we can't change our hearts we can't make ourselves right with God and we can't live the Christian life without Jesus Christ it's that it becomes just an outward sham if we're trying to do it in our own strength if it's religious observance or if it's just doing things on the outside it's an impossible life unless we it's impossible to be renewed on the inside unless we recognize that Jesus Christ is the one who promises to renew us and change us and so being a disciple of Jesus is always about getting to the heart of your matter getting to the heart of you as a person and me as a person it's knowing where our priorities lie it's knowing where our heart lies it's knowing where our love lies because these these are the things that will compete for our priorities and for the believer it needs to all be about Jesus in our heart and that's tremendously difficult humanly speaking because in the words of the

great hymn we're prone to wonder we're always prone to wonder from him and therefore it's so significant not just in our own hearts but as a church that we disciple and encourage one another towards Christ all the time towards Christ

and so we have this tremendous picture of a disciple's life a life of faith someone who is blessed by God because God has come into their lives as a savior and it's a great visual picture it's a tree that's rooted beside water and it's a really easy picture to remember and it's one you can all take away and we can all take away and keep going back to it visually keep it in your mind because it helps us to understand the life of faith and what it means to be a believer and to follow Jesus the context of this chapter is deep and varied in many ways but very very briefly it's written as a prophecy Jeremiah as a prophet to an old testament people of God who have turned away from God they were in the promised land they were God's chosen people they were promised blessing as they remained consistent and close to God but they turned away from him and went after idols they they forgot their hearts they forgot their needs they forgot what it was to belong to God and they turned after idols and followed idols and therefore came under God's judgment and were exiled from the promised land into

Babylon they had moved from trusting in God to trusting in themselves again God became insignificant to them God had taken them from the from Egypt God who'd parted the Red Sea God who brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey God who defeated their enemies they just forgot about him they forgot their need of him and they moved far from him so he was they he he exiled them in Babylon because they had got it all wrong they'd forgotten their need for the living God and he gives them here a tremendous picture through Jeremiah of what it means to trust again in the living God and it tells us about God and it tells us about them or ourselves and it tells us what healthy faith looks like and it's a picture so just a couple of things in this picture briefly the first is that God is pictured as living water God is pictured as living water blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord he'll be like a tree planted by the water and that's a really strong biblical image it it's through right through the Bible where water symbolizes life and and often symbolizes God it's a strong Bible image and it's it's a great image because water is so significant probably after three weeks almost solid rain you know that more than most uh here in Harris so I've been told it's been a lot of rain uh but water is a hugely significant ingredient that sometimes we forget over 60 percent of our bodies are made up of water it's life's great ingredient water no water no life you know you see all these cosmologists and everyone going to planets millions thousands of light years away looking for signs of life and they look for water uh for signs of life and I think probably we don't value water um as much because it's so available to us you know it runs freely from our taps it's all around us it's cheap and plentiful or free um but even in the few occasions in uh in the UK when there's a scarcity of water when there's a drought or when there's been a long summer how quickly things disintegrate how quickly things go bad and how how quickly we see the significance and importance of water we might not see it very easily but certainly the ancient Near Eastern people understood critically how important water was they came from a kind of desert uh environment and they knew that without water they would die it was it was water is very much a life and death matter for those who lived and traveled near and through the deserts and so God is reminding us that he himself using this picture that we can understand and associate with is the source of life God is where we get life you are all here this evening and I am here this evening because God has ordained and allowed us to be here because he's gifted us life whether we recognize or accept or thank him for that or not he's the wellspring of all life of every planet of all the cosmos he is the one who gives life and without God there would be no life he nourishes life he is active in promoting and keeping life going and your life going he is a powerful mysterious gentle sweet and satisfying source of all life on this planet and in the universe and more than that

because we know as right from the beginning when humanity sinned they broke from life they didn't die immediately satan was right you'll not surely die he was half right wasn't he but they didn't surely die immediately but they started dying and they entered a spiritual death where they were separated in and and from communion with the living God and when Jesus comes Jesus comes back uh Jesus comes and reminds us that he is he is the source of spiritual life living water remember the story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman you know I uh I am the source of living water and she says oh give me that water that'll save me coming back here all the time to draw water from the well and he says oh he who draws from this world will never thirst again so he's speaking spiritually and reminding himself that he is the source not only of of life but of spiritual life he's come to redeem and bring life and there's that great passage from John 7 37 38 last great day

of the feast Jesus stood up and said I am the water of life you know I'm the living water uh come to me all you who thirst and he goes then goes on to speak about the Holy Spirit coming into our lives and bringing spiritual life so what God is reminding us here and what Jesus Christ goes on to use and take himself is that outside of Jesus Christ there's not really life at all outside of Jesus Christ you're dying and spiritually you're dead and we were all in that position we were all born in that position but in Christ united to Christ we're united to life we're united to living for that's why we live forever in Christ even though we die yet shall we live and uh that's really what he's speaking about uh the life of faith and the life of belief uh is eternal life we we will never die because we are united to Jesus and God who is the author and the giver of of life from whom sin separates us and this picture of uh the God who offers life uh as living water says uh of the person who is beside uh him is blessed blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord so it's a picture of trusting a picture of faith a picture of faith a picture of belief in God and he offers us his blessing it's a great word that word blessing blessed is the one who trusts it it really just speaks of abundant life when when the Bible when God speaks of blessing it doesn't necessarily mean riches it doesn't mean necessarily health or or um prosperity at that level it's a much it's a much bigger stronger word than that and it speaks of well actually the best way to describe it i think is is knowing God's shalom

[14:48] God's peace you know it speaks a lot about when we're separated from God because of sin we don't know his peace his shalom in our lives and for the Hebrew the word shalom was a really big strong word that didn't just mean absence of war it meant just well a wholehearted well-being in our lives sense of being complete even in difficulty even in struggles being complete being fully human because we are alive again in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and it's something that every single human being looks for people that have never been near a church who know nothing of God or Christ or people who have been around church but have never come to Christ or all of us as people are always looking for well-being for blessing for completeness for meaning in life and the Bible says where are you looking for that many people are looking for it in pleasure or in holidays or in relationships friends or lovers and family and career and wealth even amazingly some in politics or following a just cause looking for significance and meaning and importance in any of these areas and God's reminding us that none of them can bring blessing many of them are very worthy in and of themselves nothing wrong with them unless they become ultimate in our lives unless they take the place of God unless they take the place of our need for a Savior they can't save us they can't redeem us they can't bring us ultimate meaning and blessing and shalom

God is saying it only comes in him and through him blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord in that relationship with the living God and it's a very well it might a very famous song in my life I like Johnny Cash and and not long before Johnny Cash died he he took a song that had been written by Nine Inch Nails which is another band called Hurt and it became very famous as he sung it and one of the words one of the lines in that is what have I become my sweetest friend everyone I know goes away in the end and it's a very depressing song it's a very depressing picture about someone who's looked for blessing and fulfillment and satisfaction in all kinds of things but everyone and everything in the end goes away and leaves them alone and that is the opposite of what God is offering in Christ is his blessing his wholeness his fullness so we have this picture of God who's a living water the source of life that we can share in through Jesus Christ he died on the cross for our sins as we saw this morning but what is the picture of the person of faith what does faith look like what does it what does it look like to belong to to God in Jesus Christ well the picture here is of us as a tree and there's just one or two things about this tree that I hope you'll find challenging and useful in the way you think about your relationship with Jesus Christ and the first is that it's planted blessed the man who trusts in the Lord whose confidence is in him they will be like a tree planted by the water and that's a great word because a tree is planted isn't it in other words it's well and truly fixed where it is where it has grown and Jeremiah or God is using that as an illustration of the person who trusts in the Lord he's planted he's fixed there that that's where the believer is always is planted trusts in the Lord twice he says it because that's significant and it's the picture of someone who it doesn't matter what happens in Christ they will remain planted and founded and fixed in Jesus

Christ you know it's the attitude of Luther when he had created the whole furore of upsetting the Holy Roman Empire and he says this is where I stand I can do no other or um Joshua where he says that's for me in my house we will serve serve the Lord you know planted this is this is a

mindset uh because they're secure that is where faith is the blessed person is the one who sees Christ and the gospel not something that they can drift from not just something that is uh uh impermanent in their lives but whatever happens they see Christ as their unchanging hope whatever turmoil whatever difficulty happens he is their foundation and that's the mindset and that's a great mindset for us to have as Christians and that's what he looks for us to have and that's where blessing is we don't have all the answers we don't know what uh sometimes is going to happen but we trust that he is good because of what he's done on Calvary we've experienced his grace and we've got nowhere else to go it's like Peter when when Jesus had these hard sayings and the Bible tells us that lots of the disciples turned away from Jesus after these hard sayings and Jesus looks to Peter and said you can will you leave also and Peter says well where can we go where can we go you have the words of eternal life and that sense of being planted is a great place to be uh and fixed uh independence on God so being planted is important and the reason we can be planted as believers is because of what is happening beneath the surface not our persona not our profile not our intelligence not our gifts but what is happening where nobody sees what's happening under the surface our strong roots a tree planted by a river by a water that sends out its roots by the stream there's this intentionality in the privacy of our lives and of our hearts to have the very foundation of our life sent out into the person of Jesus Christ that we are reliant on Christ we are dependent on Christ we are looking to Christ we are praying to Christ we're in relationship with Christ and our hearts are focused on Christ the times that nobody sees you only know what you're like in these times what you are in your heart this is not about your gifts it's not about what you're like in church this is about your character the private unseen character what you think about when nobody knows what you're thinking about what you think about when you go to bed at night what's on your mind and in your imagination where you look to for strength and nourishment and energy and beauty in verse 10 he links our heart and our mind the Lord searches the heart and examines the mind it's what we are in our mind it's the intentional direction of our inner being is it pointed towards Jesus not what we say about

Jesus in public but in the very privacy of our own heart what is it that energizes you grips our inner thoughts what is our priority for so often in our lives our priority is to get to the top of the tree to be number one and yet what God is saying I don't care about the top of the tree I care about the roots what's unseen what's in the heart and that is why the gospel exposes us to our need of Jesus Christ because we can't change our hearts and we can't become pure and right before him and it's a lifelong challenge to have the the very roots of our hearts constantly receiving nourishment and energy and forgiveness from the living water from Jesus Christ himself so often we have different idols and in John 15 where we have a kind of slightly different agrarian picture of the vine and the branches which is kind of similar it's not roots so much but vine and branches Jesus says I said you know you must be connected to the vine and he goes on to say because without me you can do nothing we can nothing he says we can do nothing spiritually of any value and good so strong roots also it's evergreen that it's leaves that it does not fear when heat comes its leaves are always green and that's simply a picture I believe and I'll explain why briefly of our own character our own character is alive it's evergreen spiritually because we are gaining our strength and energy from the living water from the Lord Jesus

Christ it's one that over it does not fear when heat comes and that's just a picture of suffering or difficulties or troubles and when the heat the drought comes the heat comes it's not saying we're never afraid but it says we overcome fear do you know many times in the Bible Jesus or God says do not be afraid 366 times one for every day of the year and even one on the day of a leap year because we're prone to be afraid every single day and yet he says as we are rooted in him we overcome our fear because our faith is not dependent on our circumstances and on sometimes the drought and the relationships and the troubles and the brutality and the letdown and the hurt and the exposure that we face in our lives and when these times come we're prone sometimes to blame God if our roots are not being nourished in the person and in the grace and in the goodness of Jesus Christ because he's good even in drought strong roots planted evergreen and also fruitful they send the roots by the stream it does not fear when heat comes leaves are always green it has no worries in the year of drought and never fails to bear fruit now I think this is a great point that's the last kind of main point I'm making here is when our character is rooted as believers when our character is rooted in Christ the unseen bit the private bit the bit that nobody else knows that the relationship we have on as it were underneath the surface and that all seems very personal doesn't it seems very kind of insular and private that's true it is but there's a great paradox because

although that is uh what we need to the direction of our hearts always needs to be towards Christ in private where we're relying and dependent on him it doesn't make us insular because when we're rooted in Christ it makes our lives fruitful outwardly and it means it involves sharing in other words the grace that we receive from the roots because a fruit tree is actually probably the most selfless organism in the world fruit tree never eats its own fruit a fruit tree exists and it may be evergreen but the fruit that it produces is eaten by others so there's this great paradox that below the ground we are nourished in Jesus

[27 : 12] Christ and and intentionally our lives are focused and dependent on him loving him but that means the fruit that we bear is outward looking and it involves us loving others and you know the interesting thing about fruit it's most fruit is about 90 percent water so the fruit bearing we we offer to others the fruit of our lives comes from where our roots are the living water that we are nourished by and bear and show forth so what is the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness gentleness uh meekness self-control these are spiritual gifts that we can't we can't work them up on our own they come from where our nourishment and our dependence lies and they to be fruitful is a great thing it means we're spiritually beautiful a fruit tree generally is spiritually beautiful yeah no a fruit tree isn't spiritually beautiful a fruit tree is just beautiful but uh uh i think it means we're great to look at and we smell great if if you don't mind me i don't mean that physically but i mean there's an aroma there's a fragrance about our lives that's what i mean i was in when i was 16 went to canada with my mom and dad and my sister and i still remember i was over 40 years ago uh i remember we were in canada and we were driving from somewhere to niagara falls a few few miles before niagara falls there's a place called niagara on the lake and it's this kind of idyllic little town really but as you as you drive through it as you if you take your if you put your window down there's this incredible smell because it's full of peach and apple tree orchards and i i can i can still smell them uh when i think about that place almost uh heavenly really beautiful and i think as christians when we are rooted in christ we bear fruit that makes our character beautiful grace-filled i'm not talking about something that's weak and uh uh not strong i'm not i'm not saying i'm saying it's a manly and a womanly thing that we have this great christ-like beautiful character not about show not about impressing not about deceiving others but we bear the fruit that only he cannot enable us to bear as we rely on him we'll be exposed if our roots are self-reliant if what we are in private betrays what we say we are in public it will always come out because the fruit we bear will be bitter and angry and divisive so it's beautiful and it's nourishing for others that's the great that's the great focus of our lives as christians it's not about self it's not self self self it's about the fruit bearing as we remain in christ that nourishes other people being rooted in christ my life will nourish other people we will help serve and serve god by serving others the new testament has i think something like 49 one another's you know forgive one another support one another love one another there's a whole lot of them and that's the outworking of christian lives are rooted in jesus christ we are fruit bearing so that's a great picture of faith it's a great picture of trust and the great thing is it's impossible to live that fruit bearing life particularly in drought you know we can all appear to live great

lives when things are going well but in times of drought in times of suffering in times of heat in times of loss in times of illness times of unemployment in times of breakdown how can we still bear fruit impossible the world says impossible christ says when you're rooted in me the impossible is possible and it simply requires us to be dependent on him in faith and in trust that's the place of blessing blessed is the one who trusts in the lord and whose confidence is in him maybe be a people that are confident and trusting in god because that's the only place of life without that you are dying and dead and that is what god says himself because the alternative is also pictured here and with this i finish the alternative is the tumbleweed that we always used to see in the cowboy westerns it would just the wind would come and this tumbleweed would just go across the screen and he says that in verse 5 thus the lord this is what the lord says cursed is one who trusts in man who draws breath from mere flesh draws strength from mere flesh whose heart turns away from the lord that person is like a bush in the wastelands they will not see prosperity when it comes they will dwell in the parched places of the desert in a salt land where no one lives that's god's picture of unbelief it's tumbleweed it's shrub in the desert starved of life and goodness and fruitfulness because tumbleweed is interesting stuff because its roots are very shallow and it has no deep roots so when the wind comes it just breaks off and it's rootless and it's sharp and thorny it doesn't bear fruit it bears thorns and it spreads its seed as it rolls around so it spreads its kind of badness as it

were as it rolls around it drifts it's unstable and that is god's picture of those who turn away from god that you know you're never stat you're never stopped enough in your life to allow god's light to shine into your heart to search into your heart always on the move never willing to be accountable to god never always drifting always running quick to shut off any spiritual conversation anyone or anything or any word from the bible that may leave you uncomfortable or challenge where you are no time to stop no time to send roots into christ at best you may have a nodding acquaintance with jesus but not willing to allow the deep the roots to go deep and then ultimately when the thorns of life or when the heat comes there's no fruitfulness there because there's no spiritual or supernatural ability to bear fruit you rely on inner resources human wisdom that there's no real purpose and no real promise through these dark and difficult and drought-filled times you may survive or you may blame god or rage or give up or despair or grumble or just give in there's no shalom there's no well-being and there's no hope through the darkness that we all go through in life ultimately the valley of the shadow of death so there's a very very stark uh pictures that were given of blessing and of barrenness and it's nothing to do with our gifts and it's nothing to do with our abilities it's simply to do with our recognition of our need

and recognizing the the blackness of our hearts the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond it's recognizing we're beyond cure and coming to jesus christ who freely offers the cure in himself and then root not just coming to him but rooting our lives in him forever and ever i just finished with one last little picture i preached this recently in saint columbus uh and i talked about the roots and being deep down and uh and the underground stuff and pointing towards the the river and uh i was speaking to someone after a visitor actually and uh they said um thanks for the sermon blah blah do you know about the american red pines i said nope i said they're huge you know these massive big trees you know that you see what there's something there's a picture of one of them with a massive big cut out bit cut out from the trunk and a truck can go through it huge big trees and uh this guy said their roots are really shallow i thought that ruins everything i've said ruins the whole picture the roots are really shallow but he said you know they're so big and tall he said you would think they'd immediately get blown over in the wind because their roots are so shallow he said but the interesting thing about the american red pine is all the roots are intertwined big forest of them all intertwined and that's where their strength lies as well because they're all reliant on one another and therefore they withstand the drought and the uh the winds and the wild weather and that's i suppose a slightly different but great picture also not only of our roots being deep in christ but uh of our interdependence as believers in one another needing one another loving one another supporting one another strengthening one another because we are on the front line and you know what it's like in the front line if someone breaks ranks then that makes it difficult for everyone else we are linked and united together in christ with all our failings and all our faults and all our mistakes but what christ is interested in is not our gifts it's our character and our character comes from jesus christ and being rooted in him the beauty of our character so i hope that that image can stick with you well beyond some of the words that i've said because that is a biblical picture and a challenging one for you do we trust in ourselves or do we trust in the lord let's pray father god we ask and pray that you would help us to see that picture more clearly in our lives it's very simple and very clear and we ask that through your spirit that you would challenge us maybe challenge those of us who've been christians for a long time about what we are like beneath the surface not in public not what we would like other people to think about us but in the privacy of our own hearts where does our trust lie and where are we sending our roots lord forgive us if we have drifted and backslidden and are trusting in ourselves all over again forgive us for the ignorance and the stupidity of that forgive us if we think that our public profile is important remind us of the value of character as you see it reflecting jesus in the fruit that shows our dependence on you and in so doing may we find wholeness and shalom and peace not just today or tomorrow but throughout our lives in the times of blessing and also in the times of drought that we will be evergreen and fruit bearing making us self-forgetful and really really helpful people to others nourishing and spiritually beautiful so help us we pray forgive us when we're not open our eyes if we have never seen it before and may the glory all be given to the living god in jesus christ amen