

Year B* Easter 3*
4/30/06
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This week has been very interesting spiritually. I struggled mightily with the scriptures. Particularly Micah's declaration of God's will for peace.

I know we Episcopalians are not known for our memorization of scripture; but these first verses of Chapter 4 from the prophet Micah ought to be etched in our souls.

The peoples shall stream to the LORD'S house.
The nations will openly ask to be taught by God.
And the lesson God teaches will be peace.

"God shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more."

That's a tough word from the Lord for a nation at war.

When I turned to the New Testament I heard Peter saying,

"There is salvation in no one else (besides Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

I struggle mightily with that. That's a tough word for me. I believe Christianity has grown arrogant over the centuries, believing only it has the answers, that God can only save people through our Jesus. And that sounds arrogant and untrue to me.

So I was struggling with all that. And in the midst of my struggles

another word from the Lord arrived. This word arrived in the form of news about our maple tree.

Here I'm quoting a lovely epistle written to us entitled "OUR MAPLE TREE".

"On Work Day, Sunday, April 23, we first noticed a split in a large limb of our beautiful maple tree.

Early on Monday, we were in touch with our arborist, Buddy Optikar, of Blue Ridge Tree Experts, who has cared for our aging tree for several years.

After his careful inspection, he confirmed what we feared. . .the large split limb, which actually hangs over our sanctuary, had to be removed. It posed a danger, not only to those walking outside, but to those seated in the sanctuary, and, of course, to the very structure of our church.

We were thankful that Buddy could arrange to work on our tree on Thursday, in spite of a very busy schedule.

It is estimated that our maple is over 100 years old, and we must face the

fact that old maples do not live forever. Buddy has done all possible to give us some more years of its glorious shade and autumn color, but the fact of its expendability, though hard to contemplate, is becoming something we must eventually prepare ourselves for .

In the meantime, let's enjoy each season it shares its beauty with us and pray for its long life !"

The morning after I heard about the maple this was the gospel we read at Morning Prayer. Jesus said,

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. . . Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. . .Whoever does

not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers;
such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and
burned. "

So I'm thinking about being pruned. Another tough word from the Lord.

At first I thought, "What needs to be pruned in me? A good question but one that skips a step. That question assumes I am the Vinedresser. Jesus said, the Father is the vinegrower. God is the one who decides what gets cut and what doesn't, what gets thrown on the fire and what doesn't, what get pruned to bear more fruit.

Thursday I watched as Buddy contemplated then climbed the great maple
and carefully cut
and sawed
and roped
and supported
and stopped
and contemplated and cut some more.

And I imagined God working on us like that. Taking a good long look at us then climbing on up into our branches, carefully chain-sawing here, hand-sawing there, binding weaknesses, supporting branches, stopping, contemplating more, then beginning all over again.

Does God take as good care of us as Buddy did of the Maple?
Does God know what needs to be cut out of me and thrown on the fire?
Am I willing to entrust myself into the hands, the saws, or pruning shears of God?

And what about the day the Vinegrower says, "Well, that's it for this vine."

One day it will be all over for me. Just like, one day, it will be all over for our maple out front. Just like it was all over for Jesus one day.

"Into your hands I commend my spirit" Jesus said from the cross in

John's gospel.
Into your hands.
Our lives are in your hands God.
What needs to be pruned or cut off and thrown onto the fire is in your hands.
How your peace will be established in the world is in your hands God.
How we will make peace with people of other faiths is in your hands, O God.

Like the nations who stream to Mount Zion in the book of the prophet Micah we must stream to God for instruction.
We must submit ourselves to God's justice.
We must commend our spirits into the hands of God.

We dare not trust our own wants and desires and plans. We dare not trust our own wants regarding the maple tree, or the church, or the war in Iraq, or our families, or peace among world religions. The work of making us is God's work.
What does God want?
What does God desire?
What does God will?

What does God will?
If we are really asking that question, we are more than halfway home.*
The fervent desire to seek God's will is more important than knowing God's will.

If feel like I am being pruned by the will of God.
Dead branches are being cut away and thrown on the fire.
Dead ways of thinking and being.
Ways of behaving which are destructive to me or others are being carefully sawn away.
I feel like there are branches bearing fruit in my life. Those, God is pruning and binding and supporting.

Some things about me are good and productive and need pruning.
Some things about me are dead and need to be cut away and thrown on the fire.

God is doing this.

God is the holy arborist up in the tree that is me carefully chain-sawing here,

hand-sawing there,
binding weaknesses,
supporting branches,
stopping,
contemplating more,
then beginning all over again.

My work is to be like a tree and humbly surrender my limbs to God's saw.