

Sermon for Sunday, May 24, 2026

Psalm 1 1 John 4:7-21 John 15:1-17

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

It is time my friends. Time for me to share my final thoughts from the Scriptures with you. Today's readings were chosen intending to send messages of encouragement to you as a gathering of faith-filled people. That's who you are, faith-filled people who gather because you know that Jesus is the foundation upon which we stand.

I have always loved the central verse from Psalm 1. It says,  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.

The psalmist refers to people who stay close to God, connected with God, as trees. In arid Palestine when this psalm was written all those years ago, a stream of water was a lifeline: for people, for animals, for plants and trees. Trees that grew near a stream of water flourished even in times of drought. Their roots went down deep and tapped into sources of moisture that kept the trees alive even during the most difficult of times.

That's Vasa my friends. It is a gathering of faithful people who have sent their roots down deep into the spiritual soil of God. Even when times were hard; whether that was because of economic trials, or disputes within this congregation, your spiritual roots kept this place strong. And when the time came, over and over this congregation produced leaves that did not wither, yielded fruit in season, and prospered, just as it says in the psalm.

In the passage from John's gospel the author speaks not of trees but of vines. "Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." It's the same idea as the tree metaphor. As we gather for worship, whether here in person or watching online I trust that you are doing so because you know that maintaining a connection to our Savior is the most important thing you can do. This is what it means to abide with him.

While it is important for us to nurture our connection—to abide in Jesus, we must remember that all is grace, all is the freely given gift of God. The Holy Spirit is a freely given gift to you from/by God. On this Pentecost Sunday we remember that the Holy Spirit came to everyone present in Jerusalem, without regard to race or country of origin. The same is true for you. You have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit and she will continue to abide within you. She is a freely given gift and abides where you are, no matter what challenges you might face. God as the Holy Spirit is with you.

Now John also writes in the passage that "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." You are well aware that any tree, shrub, or plant needs to be pruned at times so that it directs its energy into stronger trunks and stems; so that it grows more fully. It is time for Vasa to be pruned. I see my retirement as a pruning. I am the branch that is being pruned away so that this congregation may bear more fruit.

I loved being your pastor. I was fortunate to follow Pastor Howard White, a gifted interim, who prepared this congregation for my arrival. I have done my best to nurture you so that you continue to thrive like that strong tree planted near a stream of water. But I also came with certain skills and gifts given to me by God. I have used those skills and gifts to bring you this far. But I have nothing left—no aces up my sleeve, no party tricks left to amaze or delight you. I am not apologizing for this "emptiness" I am being candid and honest. It is time for a new pastor with new ways of presenting the gospel and new ways of worshipping to come so that you might be nourished anew. Remember a tree doesn't need just water, it also needs sunlight and nutrients. The tree that is Vasa is strong but adding some fertilizer to the soil will be helpful for its continued growth. A new pastor will provide those nutrients. *(Pause)*

One of Vasa's greatest strengths is that as a congregation, you know how to love your pastor. In return your pastor, me, has loved you back. That has been an amazing gift for which I will be forever grateful. Recently I mentioned your ability to love to a colleague of mine who served several parishes and she responded by saying that many congregations have forgotten how to love their pastor. Don't forget how to love your pastor!

Many of you have shared how much you are going to miss me; these comments have fed my soul. I appreciate your words and complements deeply. But now you need to open up your hearts to the possibility that your new pastor is going to be amazing. That

your new pastor is going to bring new and fresh ideas to this congregation just like fertilizer brings nutrients to improve the soil so that vines and trees can grow and bear much fruit.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: God is not done with Vasa! I remind you that we knew it would be hard to find an office administrator to replace Emily Peterson, and yet God brought Preston to us. He is so skilled! In the same way there was apprehension that Vasa would not find a suitable interim pastor, but the synod was watching out for us, and in a few days Pastor Tim will join you to lead you into the future. God still has work for Vasa to do: work to spread the gospel good news of Jesus. I suspect that there are pessimists in our midst, but I implore you, with love, to get on your knees in prayer and talk to God about your fear and your concern. God is not done with Vasa!

I close with a verse from John's first letter: "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another." Keep on loving each other my friends. Care for one another and tend to the branches of this tree. God has called you to be stewards of this place because God has need for this place to continue its ministry and witness of the good news of Jesus.

Have no fear little flock.  
Have no fear little flock.  
For the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom.  
Have no fear little flock. Amen.