

Pentecost 4 – June 17, 2018
Text: Ezekiel 17:22-24
Theme: "God Does What He Wants"

Have you ever seen an apple tree in late spring? Big beautiful leaves and tons and tons of blossoms right? You can almost imagine the juicy ripe apples that will be hanging there in the fall ready for the picking.

Have you ever seen a Christmas tree in late spring? I have to admit that I have. See, in Seattle, it starts raining right after Christmas and rarely stops until July. We always had real trees because they are cheap up there. And I usually bought a big tree because, again, they were cheap, so why not? Except that I did not have teen age boys in those days, so the only person who could haul the tree out to the curb after Christmas – in the pouring rain – was me. So I would stick the tree out on the back deck with the full intent of taking it out to the curb as soon as it quit raining. You get a lot of funny looks from the neighbors when you have a long-dead Christmas tree sitting on your back deck in June.

Two very different trees—one green, in bloom, full of promise, the other brown, dead and long overdue for the trash man. You know which one is going to bear fruit come fall. Not only is that dried-up Christmas tree dead, but blue spruces *never* bear fruit. But if you returned in October, you'd be surprised to find the blossoming apple tree had been struck by lightning, cut down, and thrown on the burn pile. You'd be even more surprised to find that dry and brittle blue spruce not only planted and green but full of lush, juicy apples. That would be a complete reversal of everything known and understood and

it's that kind of amazing and unexpected reversal God is talking about in our text from Ezekiel. "I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."

If you haven't noticed, God does what He wants, absolutely whatever He wants, and you can't stop it, you can't control it, you can't predict it. In our Old Testament reading, Jerusalem had relied on her own power and political might for her protection. They didn't think they needed God anymore. They could make the right alliances with the right heathen nations to get the protection they need. That did not work out for them. God calls them a tall tree, which he snapped off at the roots through the rise and fall of nations and political powers.

God is still in control of human history, even if we don't know exactly what he's doing at any given time. We can't say for sure how God is acting through what President Trump is doing or saying or tweeting. We can't predict why the internet goes down at that crucial moment we think we most need it. We don't know why we receive news from the doctor that seems so bad to us, but we know that God is never the author of evil, and he is always working for our good, and ultimately, he is always in control.

God does whatever he wants. God acts beyond our predictions and against our expectations.

“I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

God does what he wants with regard to salvation as well. When Ezekiel prophesied, Judah was being laid low, humbled, cut down, sent into exile, but God promised to plant them again in the land he had promised them. His covenant with Father Abraham would stand, and we get to see this exiled community goes from the burn pile to a blossoming, fruit-bearing tree—even though cedars *never* bear fruit— a big enough tree for all nations to find a home under its branches.

Likewise for us. We sin. We face consequences for those sins. Before God, there’s no place for our tall pride, our green and flourishing self-reliance, no place for the best we can do or the hardest we try. This is when we look for God’s great reversal. Trusting in God means giving up on your self-justification and your excuses for sin. Bearing fruit means confessing the barrenness in our lives. Being raised to life means first being torn down, laid low, and suffering the death of our pride and our arrogance.

“I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

That’s what happens in our Baptisms: God kills us. God drowns us and then raises us to life. God tears us down and then makes us grow and flourish and bear fruit. We live as baptized Christians who’ve been joined

to the tearing down and raising up power of God in Jesus Christ. In Baptism we were joined and through confession and forgiveness that tearing down and raising up goes on every day we live until we cross through that dark door of death and enter our eternal glory.

God does what he wants, and everything he wants to do, he does for us in Jesus Christ. For our sake, the Son of God, was cut down from Heaven and laid low in a manger. For our sake, the royal Son of David was dried up and nailed to a tree. For our sake, a broken corpse, laid low in a tomb, was raised up from the dead, bursting forth with resurrected life.

All of this was to accomplish what God wanted done. The God who does what he wants, whatever he wants, wants an intimate relationship with you. We are not ultimately in control of our lives, our families, our church, our nation. God is in control. And God does whatever he wants, even if you don't understand it, even if you didn't expect it, even if you don't always think you might like it. God, who works outside of human understanding or control, this almighty, all-powerful God is acting *for you*. Even when it doesn't feel like it, even when it doesn't look like it, even in the confusing and painful times, God is in control. God does what he wants, whatever he wants, and this is what he wants: to bless you and protect you, to humble you and to save you. God himself has planted you and will make you grow and flourish and bear much fruit, through Christ Jesus, our Lord.