

It was just a little twig when I planted it beside my sidewalk. We were living in North Dakota then, a place where trees are uncommon and precious. Trees were free from the Soil Conservation Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Each year I planted a few. Little twigs to be watered, protected, guarded from the rabbits. This tree was a Russian olive with its gray green leaves. For years I cared for it – pampered it. I remember my pride as it grew to match my height.

Then one week in July I went away. I attended the school of Alcohol Studies at the University of North Dakota. I remember the searing heat of that week – I was staying in a dormitory - no air conditioning. The temperature each day rose to over 100. I survived.

But in the middle of the week Sue called to say my tree had not. The heat had made it brittle, the wind snapped it off. The tree I had guarded and protected was broken.

Thus says the Lord: cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Cursed. My tree was cursed. Cursed by shallow roots – too easy a life.

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

This is not like God is cursing them – a punishment – but rather what they choose brings with it a curse for them. Who needs God when the economy is rolling along at full employment and our homes are increasing in value? Who needs God when I get a good grade on every test and my parents love me and one another? Who needs God when the world is at peace and I have been inoculated against every disease? Who needs God when my children are in bed sleeping peacefully and the neighbors are all good friends? Who needs God when I am good at my work and respected by my peers?

But the Lord says, It is a curse to trust in the flesh – in your own power and strength and wisdom – for a hot dry day may be coming - you will be like a tree that withers and dies.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Where is your life planted, rooted? What do you find time for? Of what do you say, "I meant to do that but just got too busy." If you have children what priorities do you live for them? Just what would you sacrifice for their activities? What would you sacrifice that you might get ahead in life – or have nice things?

I want it all – I think you do too. I want success as this world counts success. Victory, power, honor, wealth. And I want to be close to God – to walk with Jesus and trust in Jesus and follow Jesus.

I want it all and think I can have it all – but there is something about the way the world is that I have to choose. I have to choose whether this dollar will go to buy me a new sport coat or will buy a brick for the new sanctuary for St. James. Soon I will have to choose whether I will watch the Indians win once more – I hope – or whether to read the scriptures and take time for prayer. I have to choose.

Just I choose badly.

Jesus seems to know that when he announces to his followers: Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. But woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh but woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

The way Jesus speaks of blessings and woes is not at all like the first lesson. There we are called to trust in the Lord but Jesus does not call us to poverty or hunger or sorrow. Yet he speaks of blessings, of woe

my choosing
I do ~~choose badly~~ all my life I seek to build security and safety for myself so I will not be poor, or hunger or have weeping. Yet it is when the harsh winds are blowing that I turn my heart to God. When the boat is

sinking I pray like I have never prayed before, when one I love is late in arriving, my mind turns to the Lord of heaven and earth. But when the sea is calm once more I forget. ~~→ I have it~~

Children are being baptized today. As I met with their parents I talked about choosing time for prayer, time for reading the scriptures, choosing time for teaching their children about God. ^{with children I'd say to see how important this is.} I hope that all of you will choose time for prayer, time for reading the scriptures, time for learning about God.

But know that if even today you find yourself withering, dead in hope, know that God is the one who raises the dead. God is the one who forgives the sinner. God is the one who is hope for those who have no hope in themselves.

Once you have been raised and forgiven and have hope once more you will know just how blessed you are in your poverty, in your hunger, in your sorrow.