

Communion Devotional

"I think that I shall never see

A poem as lovely as a tree.

A tree that in the summer wears

A nest of Robins in her hair.

Poems are made by fools like me,

But only God can make a tree.

These lines are from "Trees," by Joyce Kilmer.

Trees are mentioned in the scriptures beginning in Genesis, through to Revelation. God planted an orchard in Eden, and in the middle of the orchard were two special trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. He placed man in the orchard to care for it. And we all know how that turned out!

Despite this less than perfect start, man did learn to use the benefits from God's gift of trees. He gathered fruit from trees, such as figs, olives, pomegranates and apples. Articles made of wood soon followed. Household utensils and musical instruments were fashioned from wood; boats and great ships were built from lumber. God commanded Noah to construct the ark using wood of the Cyprus tree. King Solomon, in the splendor of his temple, used the cedars of Lebanon and evergreen trees.

Branches of the palm tree were carried at the feast of tabernacles. They were used as an emblem of victory, and spread before Christ as he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday.

Along with the benefits, man learned to use God's gift of trees for evil. Satan hardened man's heart and twisted his mind to produce an instrument of torture and death. Crucifixion on a wood cross was the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment in the ancient world. The victims were displayed in public places along the side of the road and outside the city gates as a constant reminder to all who passed by of the awesome power of Rome.

The victim to be crucified was first scourged and beaten. This was done to hasten death. Then, the victim had to carry his cross beam to the place of execution. This was to break the will to live, to signify life was over. After hanging on the cross, if death did not come, soldiers would break the victim's legs to bring on a quick death. Jesus gave up his soul to God the father, cried out and died. His legs were not broke, as this was prophesied "not a bone of his will be broken."

On that Friday, Satan knew he had won the battle. Evil had triumphed over good. Yet, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to many for forty days. Jesus had truly defeated death itself. Satan had won the battle, but God had won the war!

The resurrection of our Lord transformed the cross from a despised symbol of torture, death and hopelessness, to a symbol of eternal salvation and everlasting hope. As the rainbow is a visible sign of God's promise through Noah, so the cross is God's

sign of his promise of everlasting life, and his love for us. In this way, the cross became a tree of life again, bearing the fruit of life for us all.

Carry that theme with you, in your heart and mind, that God can overcome the evil of our past and transform us into something good for His purposes. We may feel that we are not important enough or useful enough to answer God when He calls. But only God can plumb the depths of our souls and know the true potential he has placed there.

Before we eat the bread, we remember God's everlasting promise. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread, and as he broke it he said, "Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

LET US PRAY: This bread symbolizes the body of Christ which hung on the cross, becoming the tree of life for us. In this, we partake in the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

As we prepare to **drink the cup**, we remember the words of Jesus. "He took the cup after they had eaten saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"

LET US PRAY: We remember, O Lord, this new covenant, sealed on the cross with the blood of Christ. The bitter cup you drank, the blood you shed for us, watered the cross, this tree of life. As we drink of this fruit of the vine, we proclaim your victory over death, and the assurance of our salvation through your sacrifice. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

OFFERING

Now is the opportunity to show our thankfulness to God for His gracious bounty we have received.

LET US PRAY: Lord God, loving Father, we acknowledge You as the Giver of all our blessings, both large and small. We thank you for the everyday small blessings we so often take for granted. We ask your continued blessing on our church staff, our ministers, elders and teachers. May they be good stewards of our offering to you, Lord.

We lift up to you those of our church family who are in need of physical healing. Likewise, help those who are desperate for spiritual healing. May they find peace in you. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

By Wayne Harlan for the Donelson Church of Christ, 2014 A.D.