

THOUGHTS FROM A TREE FALLING DOWN

My neighbor has decided to build a garage at the end of his driveway that will extend into his backyard. One of the first steps required for him to do this was to have a large maple tree cut down in the area where he wants the garage built. He called and let us know a few days ahead that the contractor he hired would be coming in on Saturday to do the job.

I awoke early on Saturday and discovered it was already raining. I thought for sure seeing the weather the contractor would cancel. That was not the case. I looked out my front window to see him pull up and begin unloading his equipment. I had to do a few errands shortly after he arrived but came home about 90 minutes later to see him halfway up this very large tree cutting away some of the branches.

The sound of a chainsaw at work was a constant noise throughout the morning and afternoon. I found myself staring out my back window with interest watching how he strategically made his way around this tree clearing away sections. There were times as he cut branches near my neighbor's existing tool shed that I wondered if an errant branch would land on it. As he cut each branch away, I would hear a loud thud when it would hit the ground.

Finally, around 3:30 in the afternoon, he made his last cut with the chainsaw and the stump came down. With this large maple tree now down near my property line, I noticed right away how more of the afternoon sun was shining into my backyard. I also began wondering if I would see quite a reduction in the amount of leaves I might have to rake in the fall. I usually rake up between 40-50 bags of leaves each fall just from my backyard. I am hoping this number may reduce by 20 per cent come fall. Of course, how could this cheap pastor not also think about how glad I was that I did not have to cover any of the cost of the tree coming down.

It really was interesting to watch the process unfold on Saturday. It got me thinking how Jesus spoke one time about some pruning and cutting back of branches that the Master Gardener wants to do in our lives. In the opening verses of John 15, Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also

remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Jesus described our relationship with Him in terms of a vine and its branches. As followers of Christ, we are connected to Jesus just like a branch is to its vine. He shared how believers who remain in a committed relationship with Him should be bearing "good" or "much" fruit for the Kingdom of God.

It is interesting to note in Jesus' analogy the Father's role as the "Gardener." Just as a gardener may have to cut back fruitful branches at times in order to promote more growth, Jesus shared how our Heavenly Father may have to cut or prune back certain things in us so that we can get back to bearing more fruit for Him. A question that we might want to ponder this week is what exactly might our Heavenly Father be seeing in our lives that might be impacting our ability to bear more fruit? Some possibilities might be:

- **Does He see too much busyness in our lives that might be standing in the way?**
- **Does He see some self-centeredness creeping into our branches that is hindering us?**
- **Does He see some sin creeping back into our branches that is causing our efforts to bear fruit to spoil?**
- **Does He see our passion and commitment beginning to pull away?**

Our Heavenly Father takes close notice of how well we are remaining attached to Jesus. If there is any aspect in our relationship that is hindering our ability to produce fruit let us allow our Heavenly Father to do whatever pruning is needed to get us back shining light for Him in this world.

With all of the rain we have had since Saturday I have not been able to enjoy looking at how much more sun is shining into our backyard now that the tree is down. Getting back to my cheap side, I did notice later on Saturday that my grocery store has on sale leaf bags at 50 per cent off their normal cost. I may celebrate the tree coming down by splurging and buying 20 per cent less bags than usual at a 50 percent cost reduction. I will be happy to prune back my total purchase in this manner.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean