

Session Three

Inspiring Images

BRANCHES & ROOTS : HEAVEN & EARTH

“EVENTUALLY, THE TREE BECAME A SYMBOL FOR THE DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN KENYA....THE TREE AS A SYMBOL OF PEACE IS IN KEEPING WITH AN AFRICAN TRADITION. FOR EXAMPLE, THE ELDERS OF THE KIIYUYU CARRIED A STAFF FROM THE THGI TREE THAT WHEN PLACED BETWEEN TWO DISPUTING SIDES CAUSED THEM TO STOP FIGHTING AND SEEK RECONCILIATION.” --- Wangari Maathai, page 16

Several years ago, the pictures NASA’s “Spirit Rover” was taking of Mars were all over the news. Among other excitement, there was a fascination with the high quality of photos produced, as they were taken with a modest 1-megapixel camera. (Digital cameras offering 6 megapixels and above are the most expensive and often best). The marvel was that with the high quality of the two finely crafted lenses, minimal camera technology was needed.

Like those lenses, our eyes make all of the difference. If we cannot see clearly what is around us, nothing else really matters. This session focuses on images. In it you will think and genuinely look at the common image of a tree. If we are going to make a difference in healing the Earth, the place God has given us to serve and protect, we must learn to truly see creation.

SESSION OBJECTIVE: To identify important truths contained in the image, symbol, and physical reality of trees. To practice interacting with how we can learn about God and ourselves through Creation with a focus on our own earthiness.

WORD ASSOCIATION: In a group or on your own list all the things that trees represent. “When I say tree, what is the first thing that comes to mind?” Brain storm what is important about trees.



A Billion Trees, A Singular Voice

-Wangari Maathai

1. Maathai describes planting trees as empowering people, showing them their hidden potential. How do you think the image and practice of tree planting can cause this?
2. Consider areas of the world that lack trees. What problems come with not having trees? Including pressing concerns like those of the women and children in the refugee camps in Darfur.



3. On a piece of paper, make two columns. On one side write down characteristics of “Church Activities,” on the other write down characteristics of “Tree Planting.” What elements are the same? What elements are different?
4. Read **ISAIAH 61:1-3**.
Who will be called “oaks of righteousness?” How is tree planting a part of God’s rebuilding in our society and world today?
5. Identify how you can support tree planting and reforestation. Name local needs for plant life. How would tree planting affect your community?



Tree of Heaven

A Poem by Naomi Long Madgett

Have a member of the group read the poem on page 17 aloud.

1. What does the image of a persistent tree communicate?
What does it have to say about truth?
2. Compare and contrast Madgett’s tree to Wendell Berry’s lines on page 9: “AND UNDER THE PAVEMENT THE SOIL IS DREAMING OF GRASS.” With a partner, script a conversation between yourself and a tree or other plant. What does the tree want?
3. Compare and contrast reasons that people might give for why humans should or should not be responsible to care for plant life. What is the level of priority?
4. Read **PSALM 1:3**.
How does the constancy of a tree relate to our life as Christians?



Across the Lawn

A Poem by Paul Willis

Have a different member of the group read the poem on page 67 aloud.

1. Identify the emotions being in the tree brings out.
How can a tree both inspire great heights and modesty?
2. What role does lifting someone up play in this poem? In your faith?
3. Read **ROMANS 11:18**.
How do you relate to being like the branches of a tree? How does the image of God as the root of the tree change your ideas of where God dwells?

Heaven Earth

Review the following statements from the magazine, noting the emphasis that the authors have placed on Heaven's location.

"OUR YEARNING IS NOT TO GO TO HEAVEN, BUT FOR HEAVEN TO COME TO EARTH, FOR GOD'S RULE OF PEACE AND DELIGHT TO BE MADE FULLY REAL ON EARTH... IN THE LORD'S PRAYER WE PRAY THAT GOD'S WILL BE DONE 'ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.'" -- *Steven Bouma-Prediger, page 31*

"IN FACT, IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION, HEAVEN IS NOT SOMETHING WE ARE RAPTURED UP TO, BUT HEAVEN IS RAPTURED DOWN TO US! HEAVEN IN ONE EARTH AND GOD DWELLS ON THE NEW RESTORED EARTH, AND THE POISONED RIVERS BECOME THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE." --- *Janet Parker, page. 40*

"IN THE EVENING, THE CITY LIGHTS AND THE STARS BECOME ONE, AND IT SEEMS THAT THE EARTH AND THE HEAVENS MEET IN A KISS. AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, WE ALWAYS FELT CLOSE TO THE CREATOR AND WE ALWAYS RESOLVED TO DEFEND THE ENVIRONMENT, THE OIKOS OF CREATION. FROM ATOP THE MOUNTAIN WE ALWAYS FELT LIKE ECOLOGISTS."

--- *Roy May and Carlos Tamez, page 62*

1. Why is the idea of Heaven being on Earth important?
(Consider **JOHN 10:10**; "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.")
2. List all the characteristics of all different kinds of trees (bamboo, birch, pine, you name it!) Mark the characteristics of a tree that can help us in thinking about being rooted on Earth and reaching for heaven. How does this relate to Jesus coming to Earth and his Incarnation?
3. Have someone read aloud the first two paragraphs on page 32 under the heading "Healing Leaves" in the article by Steven Bouma-Prediger. Identify ways that trees can be used in our lives to bring about peace and healing.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: How does spending time looking at and thinking about creation help us understand God? How does it offer us a different perspective than society does?

God, grow in us an ability to learn from the world you have made. Open our eyes to the ways your creation teaches us. Help us to be aware of trees, of their power and beauty and the symbols they offer us. Show us more of our potential to be instruments of healing and peace in your world. Root us in your steadfast love and teach us to drink in your everlasting water. Stretch us up and out so that we can extend to others what we have received.

SOMETHING EXTRA: Consider these urban images of trees. Do trees mean something different in urban settings?

