

## **The Parable of the Trees**

**Steve Pike**

There was once a tree that was planted all by himself in the middle a beautiful meadow. He loved being alive so much that he decided to do everything he could to grow as big and tall as possible. He pushed his roots far down into the rich soil so he could drink in the cool, refreshing water and invigorating minerals that only the soil could provide. He grew his trunk nice and thick and stretched his branches out strong and long to ensure that his leaves could get plenty of sunlight. He worried that other trees might take some of his water, minerals or sunlight and stunt his growth, so he made an arrangement with a local logger to keep other plants and trees from growing around him. Occasionally, one of his own seeds would fall to the ground next to him and begin to take root and grow. But his huge, established system of roots would drink up all the nourishment of the soil, preventing the seedlings from establishing themselves and ensuring that he would continue to be the lone inhabitant of the beautiful meadow. Unhindered by any competitors, he grew so large that people came from all around to see him and marvel at his stately beauty and amazing magnitude. Hundreds of birds had room to make their nests and raise their babies in his branches. Squirrels chased each other along his massive limbs. His leaves provided cool shade on the hot summer days and many happy families came to enjoy a pleasant picnic protected from the glaring sun. His days and nights were full of joy, and he was constantly surrounded by life.

In another meadow not far away, another tree was born. He too loved to be alive and quickly began to grow. His root system was well established, and his trunk and branches began to stretch toward the sky. But unlike the first tree, this other tree in the meadow not far away allowed his seeds to take root and grow. His offspring grew and so did he. Soon his offspring had their own offspring, and over the years the beautiful meadow was transformed into a spectacular forest filled with hundreds of big, strong trees. Thousands of birds made their homes in the branches of the trees that made up the forest. It became a habitat for hundreds of species of animals and birds. Trails were built through the forest and thousands of people came to enjoy quiet strolls under the canopy of lush green branches. The tree in another meadow not far away lived his life feeling

blessed and full of great joy, surrounded by his family and their offspring as far as he could see. He was thrilled that some of his offspring grew even larger and taller than him.

The first tree continued to grow every year, but all of the attention he received was taking its toll on him. Many of the people who came to marvel at his splendor carved their initials in his bark, making him vulnerable to disease. A tiny boring worm ate his way through one of the openings in the bark created by the carvers and made his home inside the tree. Soon the worm had babies and they were very hungry. They ate into the heart of the trunk of the tree, and one day the large tree knew he was dying. With great sadness he realized that he would die alone and rot away, and soon he would only be a memory and the meadow would eventually cover over his former grandeur. He looked to see if he had any last seeds he could drop before he died, and after a careful search, he found one. With his last ounce of strength, he let go of the seed and watched as it fell to the ground. He could only hope that it would survive to leave him a legacy of life.

Not far away, a different worm made his home in the other tree in the meadow that had become a forest. The worm worked hard to bore his way into the heart of the other tree. Soon he was successful and began to grow his family in the heart of the tree. One day the other tree knew that he was dying, and although he was sad that he would no longer be able to enjoy living among his extended family, he knew that the beautiful forest would remain as a legacy of his life on the earth, and generations to come would continue to enjoy the power of that life.

The moral of the story? The first tree is a metaphor for the model of church that so many of us grew up in. The tragedy of this familiar model is that a church like the first tree may come and go without leaving a legacy of life-giving fruit behind it. The best case scenario is that it lives alone in the middle of the meadow. The other tree is a metaphor for the model of church that is emerging in the Body of Christ today. It is a tree that sends out leaders like seeds who become trees that send out other seeds and so on and so on. It is a church that leaves a changed culture in its wake. The first tree is good.

The other is transformational! The question is: “Which tree do you want the church you lead to be like?”

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