

**Well Rooted Trees: A Charge to Deacons and Congregation**  
Sermon 114 | Greystone Baptist Church | September 19, 2021  
Psalm 1

Today we recognize a new beginning. It is still the beginning of our church year, as we celebrated Heritage Sunday just last week. It is the beginning of a new season of life and ministry together – welcoming new members to the committees and teams that will help this church to function in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Among those new leaders, 7 have answered the call to serve as Deacon, and five of those new deacons will be serving in this role for the first time. So today we recognize this new beginning for them and for our church, through the ritual of ordination.

This is a beginning that is full of hope and entered into with a holy promise. The deacon is called to serve the congregation through prayer, community engagement and the sharing of gifts. In their service, they will care for you, the members of this congregation and they will lead us as we take bold steps into our future together.

But in these days of so much division and so much that remains unknown, *how* will our deacons lead us onward?

The Psalmist employs imagery of trees planted by streams of water in his ancient beatitude. Jesus would use a similar style to describe the righteous many generations later in his famous Sermon on the Mount, but here the Psalmist begins:

*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and  
night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither...*

Here, faith delights in Torah, the law of the Lord revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Torah holds within it the revelation of God to God's people and the teachings of Torah show how Jews are to live in relationship with God and neighbor. "In Judaism, revelation is an ongoing phenomenon. The giving of Torah only began at Sinai; Torah is revealed continuously. The blessing recited before and after the reading of the Torah [in Jewish life] emphasizes the point: *Barukh atah Adonai, notayn ha-Torah*, 'Blessed are You, God, who gives the Torah.' The tense is present, not past. The Torah is revealed at the instant of hearing, just as the person is revealed during the conversations that fuel relationship."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Wolfson. *Relational Judaism*. 42.

Like a tree, planted near a stream of water, scripture continually washes over the righteous, speaking anew in every moment, providing what is needed to refresh, re-imagine, and revive the relationship between God and humanity.

In our faith tradition, we also believe in rooting our lives in scripture, the words given in the past to the prophets and priests of old but interpreted through the lens of the Holy Spirit who guides us to deeper wisdom for our day. This does not mean we take the words of the past and impose them onto our world; but rather we root our lives within them, and allow them to wash over us, providing wisdom and nourishment for *our* day... for *this* moment.

The tense is present, not past.

And so the role of the deacon is one that begins and ends with scripture. One that plants itself beside streams of fresh water, allows the Spirit to wash over it offering new life, and one that with God's help, yields much fruit in its season.

In fact, this is exactly how the deacons, our spiritual leaders, will guide us through the days ahead. If they will commit themselves to be rooted in scripture in all that they do, to soak it up day and night, asking the Holy Spirit to bring contemporary wisdom through the ancient words, then perhaps they will be like well rooted trees for us... beacons of hope, servants of all, strong enough to withstand any storm, and wise enough to illumine the path forward.

And though we are ordaining and installing new deacons today, affirming their gifts and placing our trust in them as servant leaders of this congregation, we too, have an opportunity ahead. God has extended the invitation for us to begin this journey alongside these who have been called forward as deacons. We too have been invited into relationship with God, we too have been invited to root ourselves beside the streams of fresh water, and we too have been invited into the deeper wisdom that will sustain us in the days ahead.

That invitation begins and ends with the living Word of the living God.

So as we, deacons and congregation, set out on this journey of new beginnings, may we root ourselves always in the Word of God, and may the Spirit wash over them and wash over us, that we might grow together toward God, lighting the way for *this* day... yielding fruit for *this* season.

Amen.