



Lives Well-Lived

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Psalm 1

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The Pando tree, which is depicted on the front of today's bulletin, is an interesting organism. When we look at it, we see dozens of trees, but, in reality it is a single tree, a quaking aspen, and all these mature offshoots are connected by a single root system. Pando lives in Utah, where it occupies over 100 acres, weighs over 6000 tons, and has lived, in some form, for about 80,000 years. Like many other living creatures on earth, it's somewhat endangered of late, due to climate change and other factors that scientists are seeking to understand.¹

I said that the Pando tree is about 80,000 years old, but that's the age of the entire system, not the single offshoots that we see in this photo. The single trees live and die like people do, except they have a slightly longer lifespan. Scientists estimate that the mature trees in this photo are about 130 years old.

Trees in the Pando system may live and die like we do, but they do not reproduce like we do. The Pando clones itself. New trees rise up from the root system; Pando spreads like lots of the plants in our back yards spread; roots run underground for a bit and then send up a little offshoot, they run underground for a bit more and send up another offshoot, and so on. Pando self-propagates, and it is one of the oldest living organisms on earth.

The psalmist likens the happy person to a tree. Maybe the psalmist was not thinking about this great, big Pando tree. Maybe the psalmist was thinking about something like the beautiful honey locust tree that grows in my back yard, or a new sapling that the village just planted, or a wonky little olive tree by the side of the road in Palestine. Whatever. A happy person is like a tree, the psalmist tells us.

A happy person is rooted; she draws her nourishment from something bigger than herself and her own accomplishments. A happy person is rooted in God's teachings, but not just with a one-time reading. A happy person revisits and rereads God's teachings; she relearns them in each season of her life; and she drinks deeply of divine wisdom.

A happy person bears fruit; he lives a productive life that brings nourishment to others as befits his vocation. A happy person acts in ways that are life-giving. As trees recycle CO₂ and spew fresh oxygen into the air so that you and I might breathe and flourish, so a happy person supports life as he grows and matures.

A happy person keeps growing. He sends out new branches, continues to sprout green leaves, and produces fruit season after season.

¹ <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/pando-the-trembling-giant>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_\(tree\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_(tree))

Happy people are interconnected: with each other, with God, and with community. Happy people are more like Pando tree offshoots than we are like stand-alone trees. We are connected, one with another, and our lives flourish in community.

“Happy” is a tricky word, of course, because it is so often trivialized in our culture, and it is not always the word we would use in English to talk about experiencing the deepest joy of our life, which is really more of what the psalmist tries to describe. There is joy in connecting to God, deep satisfaction in bearing life-giving fruit, and blessing in connecting and staying connected to one another.

May each of us know and drink deeply of that joy. May we experience that rich gladness. May we be surrounded by the profound blessing of God. May we be like trees planted firmly by streams of water, now and in all our days. Amen.