

“ Flourishing in Every Season of Life”
Faith Formation Class
Faith A.M.E. Zion Church
June 24, 2020
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Animating Questions:

1. What conditions are necessary for human flourishing (growing, developing, thriving)?
2. Given conditions in our various environments that diminish capacities for human flourishing (e.g. systemic racism and its effects being only one), does fellowship in the church and cultivating our relationship with God contribute to human flourishing?
3. Is it possible to flourish in every season of life, specifically as we age?

A Promise of Flourishing

“It is the duty of all men to unite in fellowship, for it is only those that ‘be planted in the house of the Lord that shall flourish in the courts of our God.” (Ritual for Receiving Persons into the Church after Probation, AME Zion Church, Part VIII The Ritual, Chapter II Reception of Members, Paragraph 582 of the Book of Discipline)

Reflecting on my decision to be “planted” in the AME Zion Church rather than to “church hop” or “be a rolling stone” when we were received into full membership in Zion.

Duties:

- To promote peace and unity
- To bear one another’s burdens
- To seek the intimacy of friendly society
- To continue steadfast in the faith and in worship centered on the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- To pray and to sympathize with each other

Privileges of being “planted” in the household of God, the body of Christ, the fellowship of the Church:

- Receiving instruction in holiness from the hearing of God’s word and sharing in Christ’s ordinances (sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion)
- Being placed under the watchful care of Pastors
- Enjoyment of blessings promised only to those who are of the household of faith

Insights From A Study of Flourishing¹

“Flourishing happens when ministry is a life-enriching experience rather than a life-depleting experience.”²

¹ Matt Bloom, Ph.D. “Flourishing in Ministry: Insights from the Flourishing in Ministry Project” July 2017

² Matt Bloom, p. 3

According to Bloom, there are four interrelated dimensions of flourishing in ministry³:

Everyday Happiness

Happiness="the emotional dynamics and Subjective qualities of our lives"

Resilience

Resilience="our capacity to adapt, change, and respond to life's challenges, and also our capacity to grow, learn, and to develop new capabilities and capacities"

Self-Integrity

"Our identity or self-concept which includes the beliefs we hold about who we are as physical, psychological, intellectual, social, moral/spiritual beings; our self-image, self-esteem and self-worth; and our own sense of respect and dignity"

Thriving

"the meaning and significance we experience in our lives; our sense of having values and beliefs that inspire us, create purpose, and provide moral guidance to our lives; experiencing deep and positive connections with others."

A Biblical Passage about Flourishing-- Psalm 92: 12-15

12. **The righteous flourish** like the palm tree, and **grow** like a cedar in Lebanon.

13. **They are planted** in the house of the Lord; **they flourish** in the courts of our God.

14. **in old age, they still produce fruit**; they are **always green** and **full** of sap,

15. showing that the Lord is upright; he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

"Flourish like the palm tree"—The biblical palm tree is the date palm, which flourished in Jericho, "the city of palm trees, (2 Chronicles 28:15) where high temperatures suit it. The date palm grows 15 to 25 meters high (49-82feet) with an unbranched 30 centimeters (about one foot) in diameter. Each leaf may reach 20 meters in length (65 feet). The leaves of the date palm tree were used at the Passover and during the Feast of Tabernacles for the construction of booths (Leviticus 23:40-43). **Palm leaves were used by the Greeks and the Romans as symbols of victory** in warfare as well as in athletics. Palms were spread in the path of Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21: 8). His entry may be seen as a symbol of victory over death (Romans 6:6-9). Propagation of date palms may be by seeds or suckers that grow at the base of the tree. **They will put down deep roots that tap into underground water in semi-desert area and can even tolerate the brackish water** (slightly salty water, therefore unpleasant or distasteful water).⁴

Thus, the symbolism of the righteous "flourishing as a palm tree" suggests the following:

- To flourish as the palm tree in all seasons of life, you must put down deep spiritual roots to tap into God who is "the source and the strength of our life." When we have spiritual depth/ spiritual maturity, we seek God who will meet us to refresh and give us revelation and strength even in the dry desert places of our lives as well as through unpleasant times when the water is not fresh but distasteful.

³ Matt Bloom, p. 6-7

⁴ F. Niegel Hepper, "Palm Tree" in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Me-R, Vol 4* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2009), 365.

- To flourish as the palm tree is to have confidence that we will have victory in warfare (spiritual warfare) as well as in “athletics”--strenuous activities of life which require conditioning, discipline, confidence, and courage.
- To flourish as the palm tree is to have the faith that if we die with Christ, we will be raised to live with him eternally (Romans 6: 6-9)

“Grow like a Cedar in Lebanon”—The cedars of Lebanon probably never grew within the bounds of present-day Israel; rather, they are abundant in the high Lebanon Mountains ridge to the north of Israel. Historically, the cedar of Lebanon was one of the most important building materials in the Near East. The most famous building using cedar was Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6) and the magnificent home of Solomon (1 Kings 7). David had built a house out of cedar earlier (2 Samuel 7:2) “While cedar is fragrant and attractive, its chief value lies in being the only tree in the region abundant and large enough for big buildings.”⁵

Thus, the symbolism of believers, flourishing, growing like a cedar in Lebanon suggests the following:

- A life that is “fragrant” –giving off the aroma of Christ, the fragrance that comes from knowing him (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).
- A life that is “attractive”—by reflecting the image of God, the glory of God (Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 3:18)
- A life that edifies, building up others, helping to build the Kingdom of God

⁵ Lytton John Musselman, “Cedar” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible A-C Vol 1* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2006), 576-577