

ARE WE A TREE OF LIFE COMMUNITY? AND WHY WOULD WE WANT TO BE ONE? In the final pages of Holy Scripture (the Church's primary document as I have been apt to say) are these words. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the **tree of life** with its **twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit** each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2)

Almost a week ago a large part of the neighborhood around the Christ United Methodist Church Site congregated. For a few hours children played and laughed, parents, grandparents smiled and encouraged them. Those who came hungry were fed; those who came thirsty were offered something to drink. I grabbed as many hands as I could to shake and invite back for the next few weeks. I could hardly contain myself. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said this, "31 He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs **and becomes a tree**, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'" (Matthew 13:31-32)

These descriptions of **trees, fruit,** and the **Kingdom** were powerful images in the mission and ministry of Jesus. Because I continue to be a follower of Jesus they have been for me potent dreams for my understanding of the nature and presence of "Church" in the world and in our community of greater Akron. A **Tree of Life Community** would reflect all those characteristics that must have been in the heart and mind of Jesus when he told those parables. Here are just a few I can imagine Jesus had in mind. First a **Tree of Life Community** would provide shelter for the vulnerable. Second, it would provide an environment where people could be nurtured to grow. Third, such a community would be sturdy and steady in the face of stormy seasons. Fourth, the reference to fruit would mean that such a place would provide nourishment for body, mind, and spirit. Finally, it would be a place of healing in many different ways. It would be in other words, an **organic place**, a place that produced life over and over and over again.

ARE WE A TREE OF LIFE COMMUNITY? I think we took our first steps toward that last week. As our communities of faith (Akron First, Christ, Copley, Montrose Zion) begin to deepen our root systems, that is deepen our relationships with the Living God and Jesus Christ and tap into the power of the Holy Spirit "all things are possible." I think we want to be a **tree of life community because acting** in ways that are faithful to Jesus' mission and ministry doesn't just make all things possible but acting in faithful and fruitful ways makes all things probable.

We will continue this train of thinking in the next few weeks. But in the mean time reflect on these words. "I am the **vine**; you are the **branches**. If you remain in me and I in you, you will **bear much fruit**; . . . If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask **whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:5-8) This is my **WISH** that we be a **tree of life community and the fruit we offer the neighborhood be sweet and life giving.**