



The first reading this morning seems to have a non-stop obsession with trees. It's a piece of Scripture that would be right up my brother's alley, since he graduated from college with a degree in environmental science, and could go on and on beyond my understanding of the tall lanky plant life around us. I never cared too much about the trees until Sarah and I made a trip out to San Francisco several years ago. Yes, we did the usual touristy things walking across the Golden Gate Bridge, checking out Lombard Street that curves up-and-down a hill, and venturing over to Alcatraz Island, but a memory that continues to stick with me the most was from about ten miles north of the city, the Muir Woods National Forest.

Before that, the only connection I had to redwood trees was from that song we were forced to memorize at some point in my younger years: "from the redwood forests to the New York islands." I'm sure I saw pictures of them at some point, but it isn't quite the same until you stand underneath one of them. So, "the large trees in Muir

Woods are the coastal redwoods, the tallest of all living things... The tallest coastal redwood [there] is about 258 feet [so stacking 45 of me, or so, to make that height]. Further north, these trees can reach heights up to 379 feet, [over 70] feet taller than the Statue of Liberty. The average age of the [ones] at Muir Woods is between 600 [and] 800 years, with the oldest being at least 1,200 years... This is still young for redwoods as they can live [over 2,000] years." If only God's trees could talk: the story they could tell. And there is one story from over the past century when Muir Woods became an official national monument that makes this small speck of California all the more fascinating.

You see, back in 1945, over 50 nations were attempting to come together to form a long-lasting peace after the atrocities of World War II, and they held a two-month conference in none other than San Francisco. It was scheduled to start on April 25. However, something happened two weeks before. One of the men responsible for helping start this movement for the United Nations was President Franklin D. Roosevelt, but, on April 12, he suffered a massive stroke and ended up dying. Nevertheless, the conference went on as scheduled: "268 delegates, representing 46 nations, gather[ing] in San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House to begin their first session."

Now, during the planning of this event months before, the still relatively young National Park Service tried to come up with an idea to include nearby Muir Woods as part of the peace conference. It made it all the way up to the Secretary of the Interior, who wrote this message to the still-living President. The Secretary wrote, "Not only would this focus attention upon this nation's interest in preserving these mighty trees for posterity, but here in such a 'temple of peace' the delegates would gain a perspective and sense of time that could be obtained nowhere in America better than in a forest. Muir Woods is a cathedral, the pillars of which have stood through much of recorded human history. Many of these trees were standing when Magna Carta was written. The outermost of their growth rings are contemporary with World War II and the Atlantic Charter." So, FDR did his best to ensure the national treasure would be part of the itinerary, but, of course, things changed after his death.

Except, in a moment of international respect and camaraderie, the foreign minister of Brazil, who headed up his nation's delegation to the U.N., proposed a memorial for President Roosevelt in none other than Muir Woods. So, "the delegates traveled on chartered buses across the Golden Gate Bridge and down into the serenity of Muir Woods National [Forest]; they...gathered quietly in the park's 'Cathedral Grove' to hold the memorial service for the late President Roosevelt." That day of May 19, 1945, might just be one of the most wonderful examples of the reading we heard from Ezekiel: not only how such magnificent beauties of nature provide their own shelter and serenity and sources of health for the world, but that God's trees would inspire us to do the same for each other.

If only God's trees could talk: I have a feeling they would tell us to take not just a single moment, but many moments every day, and take this whole beautiful world in; be mesmerized by its captivating serene wonder. If God's trees could talk, they could tell of the times when children played around them, or a random person sat up against them, or another just stood up and stared, as if the trees could actually talk, and bestow on us hope and a drive to be messengers of comforting embraces just like them. If God's trees could talk, they could tell us of a time when a group of people from all over the world sat in their midst and mourned of another's death, and yet still believed in a peace meant for all people to enjoy, and God's trees would convince us, today, to fall in love with that mind-boggling peace all over again. Of course, it was off a broken-apart rugged piece of tree that God delivered the Gospel to us all: that nothing can ever happen in this life to separate us from God's most comforting embrace in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, not even death itself. And for that Greatest News of all that is proclaimed even through the Creation, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.

*Source: "Muir Woods: National Monument California," National Park Service
(<https://www.nps.gov/muwo/index.htm>)*

Image: Muir Woods (National Park Service, nps.gov)