

I [Gene Albright] grew up in a Lutheran church in Wichita, KS. I was baptized as a baby, went to Lutheran preschool, attended Vacation Bible School, was confirmed and took my first communion in junior high. When I was in high school, our youth group performed a traveling youth sermon at area churches. We purchased a play about 3 trees for our dramatic presentation. The general message was about God having a plan for our lives. The short version of the story is there were three trees that grew together. One became the manger Jesus was laid in, one became the boat where Jesus calmed the storm and the final tree became the cross Jesus was crucified on. We decided the play needed a homily and since I don't have a fear of public speaking, I became the choice to write and present it. It made sense to me to tell the same story but from the perspective of Biblical figures. I talked about Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem on a donkey while Mary was near labor and how miserable that must have been. I talked about the fear the disciples felt before Jesus calmed the storm and finally I examined the physical, emotional and spiritual pain Jesus felt while being crucified. In each case, the tree provided the background for the scene.

A few years after this, Brooke and I were married in the Lutheran church and started our family. About 13 years ago, we left the Lutheran church, just after Grace was born, for an Evangelical Mega

Six Flags Over Jesus church following an invitation from a friend of mine from college. We were seeking a group of people in a similar life stage as us and my parent's church did not have a lot of families like that.

Over time, we became very involved in the Evangelical church. Brooke was the Director of the Mothers of Preschoolers program and I was the director of the AWANA youth ministry program. Everything with a megachurch is amplified. For instance, the AWANA ministry I oversaw served over 300 youth from Age 3 through 6<sup>th</sup> grade every Wednesday during the school year. Just the registration night alone was an exercise in Operational Engineering and Logistics. We had 110 volunteers spread over a three-level reporting structure. Brooke's MOPS ministry was equally burdensome. We also led a small group home Bible study and Brooke would help in the nursery on occasion.

One day, we decided to move to Colorado. I had done work with a company in Castle Rock and I called them asking if they needed an engineer and it turned out they did. So, we moved here. We began to look for a church home and found another megachurch. We attended that church until about a year ago. Brooke attended here at Parker Hilltop once or twice and then I came with her on Easter. We brought the kids shortly after that and we've been regular attenders since.

I think about the three trees and the homily I wrote. If I were to write it now, it would be different. Instead of retelling the same story from a different perspective, I would talk about the seemingly random events that combine to become our lives. There actually were trees that existed that were used to make mangers and boats and crosses. Seeds actually fell to the ground and grew into trees that were cultivated to become background items that appear in our stories. Depending on your belief in the literalness of the Bible, these were actual objects.

We can see it in our building here, the beautiful wood structures above us. The metal used in the light fixtures. The stained-glass in the windows. These materials exist at the same time as the trades-people who crafted them into this building at the same time we are all gathered here.

I believe the same is true for people. Philosophers way smarter than me have and will continue to debate free will versus destiny. But looking back over the past several years, I see a continuous theme that led us here now.

We moved to Colorado on what was effectively a whim. Brooke and I grew up in Wichita. Went to college, got married, had kids and never left home. The idea of moving out of state never occurred to us. I don't know if it was the stress level of our workload in ministry, if it was wanderlust because we never really left home or if we were just run down by the monotony of seeing the same people and having the same experiences we had been having since we were kids. But something we can't explain moved in us to leave home. And when we were motivated to move, a job that was not advertised and was not planned by the company was available for me.

We didn't know anything about the Denver Metro Area. My job is in Castle Rock and Brooke picked Parker for our home off a map. We had an idea of what we wanted to live in for a house and that drove us to the Pinery. We had one day to find a house and the very first house we looked at ended up being our home.

When we stopped attending our previous megachurch, we never even discussed it. It just happened one week that neither of us felt like

that was home for us any longer. We were nervous about bringing the kids here because we thought they would be bored after the megachurch rock parties they had known their whole lives. Turns out, they love it here and they never really liked the worship style of our evangelical churches because each of them had to split up into their own age group and they never saw each other.

These events have lined up in our lives to bring us to this place at this time. As an engineer, I most understand God through the act of creation and the rhythm and flow of the super-system we live in. Like the three trees, I believe God has cultivated each of us to be here now, with each other. I believe each of us has a similar story for the paths our lives have taken. And I believe each of us has a role God has set aside for us.

In the middle of road, it may seem random and without direction. But looking back from where we are now, I see a road that was laid out for us and the events of our lives prepared us for our roles now. As I look at this conclusion, I ask the question, "why?". If I believe that God has brought us together now, I must believe it was for a reason. As this is a stewardship presentation, the natural question to finish with is what can each of us do with our time, talents and resources to serve God's kingdom? What is God's plan for each of our trees?