

Deeply Rooted Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

I struggled to find the right opening illustration for my sermon today. As you can see the title of my sermon is "Deeply Rooted," so I Googled "stories about roots" looking for something to spark my imagination.

- I found – to no surprise – a lot of information about the 1976 mini-series titled "Roots" by Alex Haley. A lot of us watched that mini-series, and it continues to re-run occasionally on TV.
- And I saw a lot of advertisements about the importance of getting your DNA tested so you knew who your ancestors were.
- Something I read in my Google search caused me to remember a poem about trees I had to memorize in high school. You might remember it:

I think that I shall never see, a poem as lovely as a tree. (Joyce Kilmer)

- Surely, I thought, of all the goofy things people write poems about, someone has to have written a poem about roots. But I couldn't find one. (If you know one, send it to me. And if I just inspired you to write one, please give me credit for being your muse.)

I suppose that is because we don't generally think of roots in a positive way. Roots aren't cool. We are more interested in the FRUIT produced by the plant, not the ROOTS underneath.

- Roots are those things that cause my sidewalk to crack and raise up.
- Roots are what I hit with the lawnmower.
- Roots cost me money. In our previous house I would have to pay the drain cleaning company a couple of hundred dollars a year to run their augurs through my draining tile to clear the roots.

So here comes our text for the day, celebrating "roots."

And I pray that you, being **rooted** and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-20)

The writer actually prays that I will have the qualities of a root! Amazing.

This is the second in a series of sermons that answer the question "Who Am I?" This is a series that attempts to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus.

When I say, "I am a Christian," what does that mean? Who am I?

Last week we learned that, as Christians, we are built on a firm foundation of faith – a foundation that was laid by the apostles and prophets, and given direction by Jesus Christ our cornerstone.

- It is that foundational faith that shapes our lives and sustains us in the storms.

Today the image is a root.

One of the things I believe about Holy Scripture is that it says exactly what God wants it to say.

- We are used to living in a world where people are always taking back the words they use. “Oh I didn’t mean it that way.” “That was the wrong word.”
- God never has to do that. If the Bible says “root,” then God meant to say “root.”
 - Even if I don’t think roots are cool, God has something I need to understand if He describes me as a root. So what is that?

UNDERSTANDING #1: MY ROOTS ARE THE SOURCE OF MY LIFE

Any student who has taken a general sciences class will tell you that plants get their nutrition through their roots.

- If you went into the Youth Building at the Clark County Fair this week you saw some 4H projects that demonstrated that truth.
- I’m sure we weren’t the only parents to have little pea plants in Styrofoam cups sitting in our windowsill, remnants of an elementary school science experiment about roots.
- Farmers are constantly checking the nutrient levels of their fields so that the roots of their crops have everything they need to produce healthy plants and a huge harvest.
- Karen planted blueberries this spring and recently added some plant food to the soil so the roots could get what they needed.

We get this concept, right? It’s the same spiritually. The quality of my spiritual life has its source in my spiritual roots.

There are several nutrients that the soil in our Grace garden needs in order to produce a healthy crop of vegetables: Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium, to name a few. Roots will search the soil to find these. It’s an amazing part of God’s design. They know what they need, and they go looking for it.

What does my soul need? Look at the text:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 4:17-18)

Just as nitrogen and phosphorus and potassium give life to the plants, God's love gives life to those who believe in Him:

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

This love gets absorbed at the root level. It doesn't get sprayed on my leaves. I draw it through the root.

- It comes as you begin to understand what Jesus did for you.
- If you were to ask me "What's the most important worship service of the year?" my answer would be "Good Friday." It's a "root" service. There you grasp what Christ did.

UNDERSTANDING #2: MY ROOTS ALLOW ME TO FLOURISH

I'm a townie, so I didn't study agriculture, and I didn't participate in 4H. I had to learn this principle in my organizational development classes.

The part of the tree I see is only as big as the part I don't see.

That is the spread of the leaves and branches tells you how far the root system extends. In organization development we talk about becoming "top heavy" – so much going on that the structure can't support it.

- The more I want "up here" the more I have to develop "down there."
- Otherwise the whole system will collapse.

Psalms 1 is an all-time favorite for many people. It speaks to this. It doesn't use the word roots, but it is a "root psalm."

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.
(Psalm 1)

It's an image repeated by the prophet Jeremiah. He DOES talk about roots:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.
⁶ That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes.
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.
⁷ “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:5-8)

Flourishing that lasts requires roots that go deep into the love of God.

UNDERSTANDING #3: MY ROOTS WORK BEST WHEN THEY GO DEEP

Once upon a time, there were two neighbors. One of them was a retired teacher and another was an insurance agent who had a lot of interest in gardening. Each of them planted a garden with many of the same plants.

- The retired teacher gave only a small amount of water to his plants. He really pay a lot of attention to them.
- The other neighbor spent a lot of time in his garden. He gave his plants a lot of water to his plants, and was constantly tending to them.
- The retired teacher's plants were simple but looked good. The insurance agent's plants were much fuller and greener.

One night, there was a heavy rain and a wind due to a minor storm. Next morning, both neighbors came out to inspect the damage to their garden. The insurance agent discovered that his plants were uprooted and totally destroyed.

- But the retired teacher's plants were not damaged at all and were standing firm.

“We both grew the same plants together, I actually looked after my plants better than you did for yours, and even gave them more water. Still, my plants came off from the roots, while yours didn't. How is that possible?” asked the insurance agent.

The retired teacher smiled and said, “You gave your plants more attention and water, but because of that they didn't need to work themselves for it. You made it easy for them. While I gave them just an adequate amount of water and let their roots search for more. And, because of that, their roots went deeper and that made their position stronger. That is why my plants survived”.

Going deep in your faith is a good thing. You can never overdo it. But that happens as you spend time on your own. You will never have deep roots if you rely only on the water you get from me.

APPLICATION

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 4:17-18)

It's all about the roots. That's what one homeowner discovered when he planted apple trees on opposite sides of this property.

- On one side the trees were a hedge to hide an unsightly view of an old landfill.
- On the other the trees provided shade to where he could rest near a cool mountain stream which ran along his property.

As the two trees grew, both produced began to flower and bear fruit. One day the man decided it was time to pick some apples.

- He started with the trees hiding the view of the landfill.
 - As he brought the fruit inside the house, he noticed that the apples were not very symmetrical, even though they still looked OK.
 - But that evening, when he bit into one he found it to be extremely bitter, and completely inedible. He ended up throwing the whole basket away.
- He decided to see how the apples on the other side of the property turned out.
 - After walking across the yard, he took a piece of the fruit from the other tree and bit into it.
 - Those apples were sweet and delicious.

The fruit was greatly affected by the nutrition absorbed by the root. Just as the tree grew by the landfill to be bitter, and the tree by the stream produced sweet fruit, so the Christian has a choice.

It's the root that bears the fruit.

Who am I? I am a Christian deeply rooted in the love of God, and my faith flourishes because it.

Amen.