

Preparation for reading:

In an earlier sermon of this series I shared that of the 13 letters usually attributed to Paul scholars are in agreement that 7 are surely written by Paul: I, II Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, Galatians, I Thessalonians and Philemon. Three others, I, II Timothy and Titus, are most surely not authored by Paul himself but by a later writer. The authorship of the remaining three: Ephesians, II Thessalonians and Colossians, remains in the “disputed” category, written later. Who wrote the letter to the Colossians? We don’t know—perhaps Timothy, perhaps another companion of Paul. I say this because I refer to “the author” rather than “Paul” and I want you to know why.

“My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you’ve been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now *live* him. You’re deeply rooted in him. You’re well constructed upon him. You

know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught.

School's out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving"

Deeply Rooted Branching Out

Colossians 2:6,7

Stewardship Season

October 8, 2017

"Linda, you have to tell us what to do! We need some guidance! It's one thing after another!" I was barely inside the front door of one of our older member couples when the cries of exasperation and lament started tumbling out. It was Tuesday of this last week. The details of both the massacre in Las Vegas and the extent of devastation in Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria were dominant on all the news channels. Once inside the door, the political rants began--- which wisely I neither supported nor refuted. I didn't tell her what to do. Soon the conversation defused itself as I settled in for a cup of coffee and a pastry. It became apparent that

this member didn't really expect to hear a pastoral response to her angst. She just needed to vent. Be heard.

But her question is a valid and necessary one, and I'm sure shared by many of you here: what does our Christian faith have to offer us in a world of wars and rumors of wars, a series of devastating weather events, another shooting spree killing dozens, wounding hundreds; divisive political rhetoric. What does our Christian faith have to offer us when it comes to Stewardship? Yes, stewardship—we kick off our Season of Stewardship today and we're not starting with what's in our wallets, we're starting with what's underfoot.

What's under there? Where are you rooted?

We're talking about roots today.

"No risk", writes Hope Jahren in Lab Girl (half memoir, half treatise on plant life) "is more terrifying than that taken by the first root. A lucky root will eventually find water, but its first job is to anchor—to anchor an embryo... the odds are more than a million to one against success. But

when it wins, it wins big. If a root finds what it needs, it bulks into a taproot—an anchor that can swell and spilt bedrock and move gallons of water daily for years, much more efficiently than any mechanical pump yet invented. As soon as a seed is anchored, its priorities shift and it redirects all its energy toward stretching up to capture light to fuel the process which keeps it alive.”

A moment for botany:

Chemically speaking, the purpose of roots is to absorb water and nutrients in the soil and then, through a highway of organic drinking straw-like structures, send that water up the trunk, through the branches and out to the leaves. There’s a lovely reciprocal relationship between those leaves and the roots: chlorophyll-containing leaves produce sugar with the help of sunlight (Photosynthesis). That sugar is transported back down the trunk to the roots as energy for growth. Without good roots, the leaves suffer.

Structurally speaking trees need a soil into which roots can successfully embed themselves. Not too much water, not too much sand, and ideally, close enough to other trees that the roots can intertwine and help each other. Without sufficiently gripping roots, trees are top heavy and succumb to high winds. The purpose of roots is to counterbalance the height of the trunk and weight of the crown where thousands, millions of leaves catch the wind in their sails and dare the tree beyond its point of flexibility or strength.

Nourishment and stability define the purpose of roots in the plant world.

The author of the letter to the Colossians borrows language of botany to discuss spiritual strength. The best “soil” in which to be nurtured and stabilized and flourish, he argues, is... Christ. Remember, you are deeply rooted *in Christ*.

The writer of the letter to the Colossians has reason for concern. Teachers of another religion or philosophy are apparently trying to

convince the Colossian church folks that their Jesus Way is deficient, missing some secret truth or essential astrological spirit's insight. Perhaps some of those church members are beginning to believe it's true so they sought advice and this letter is the response.

No, the author says, you have all that you need, all knowledge, strength, power. You are already in the fertile "soil" of the gospel. You've learned the basics; what you know is sufficient; now, go live as you have been taught.

The details differ, but Christians today as well question if the teachings of Jesus are sufficient. Is where we plant ourselves, as we try to make meaning of the world around us, providing everything possible for finding solace in an anxious world, for giving us tools in the face of depressing circumstances? Goodness, we have choices—some turn to nihilism or cynicism—what does it matter anyway?, others to materialism—I'll feel better with more stuff; Still others slide, turn away

from anything external to the self and become egotistical narcissists.

Some, utterly undone, turn to violence, against the world or themselves.

My message to you here this morning and to the frustrated woman who greeted me at her door last week, "Remember where you are rooted". I do believe we forget—both in whom, and the impact of what that means.

We are rooted in Christ. In Christ we are stabilized, nourished.

Huh? Linda, nice poetry, but tell me what that actually means.

I'm going to suggest that in Christ, we are bathed in macronutrients (carb, fat, amino acids, iron, potassium to name a few). Christ surrounds us with these qualities, these macronutrients, available to us as we grow and sprout and branch out: I'm identifying 6, but there are surely more.

1. In Christ, we are rooted in the *Creativity* which gave birth to the cosmos. "Everything", as Eugene Peterson translates Colossians 1, "absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after

rank after rank of angels... everything got started in Jesus the Son and finds its purpose in the Son. In every circumstance those rooted in Christ are connected with the power and imagination that raised up the peaks of the Himalayas, formed dunes and depths of Lake Michigan, formed lungs to transfer oxygen from air into the body, four-chambered hearts to pump blood; the cornea to receive images and retina to translate them to the brain for coordinating the body's interaction with the environment. In Christ we are rooted in the cosmic visionary, engineer. We are fed with the spirit of creativity.

2. In Christ we are rooted in *Reconciliation and Peacemaking*. Again from the Message, Colossians 1:15 "All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms, get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies" because of Jesus' death and God's act of resurrection. We talked about this two weeks ago: all the destructive, dividing, hostile forces which led to the death of this good and holy man,

Jesus, were rid of their power and divisiveness when Jesus was found alive. The dividing walls of hostility are torn down. Debilitating sins separating humans from God are washed away, white as snow. Rooted in Christ we are rooted in the Reconciler and Peacemaker, giving us the possibility and inspiration to do the same.

Creativity and Reconciliation are two macronutrients in our Christian soil:

3. In Christ we are *rooted in Hope*: not Pollyanna optimism, but robust Hope that goodness will triumph over evil, and love over hate, peace over violence. God didn't write a tragedy, God wrote a dramatic comedy. A story beginning in goodness will end in goodness. In Isaiah, chapter 25, "God will throw a party. Best meats, finest wines, the shroud of death handing over everything will be removed, and all traces of death and its causes, its effects will be swallowed up." There are days when the Final Hope pulls me through what seems a hopeless national or world situation. You and I can allow this essence of Jesus to soak into our roots.

And we can turn with hope to the Good Shepherd, who always comes looking for us when we are lost in the dark and scary places, in the crags in the rocks, in the valleys where death threatens. We are rooted in a living hope that will never leave us alone.

Rooted in Creativity, Reconciliation, Hope and now Justice

4. In Christ we are rooted in Justice and Mercy. Jesus allows the poor to glean from a field on a Sabbath. He breaks religious rules to heal the sick on the Sabbath. He forgives a woman accused of adultery. In Christ we are bathed in the one who feeds the hungry; defends the oppressed; stands up for women and children, the outcast, the despised, the sinner and calls on the rich and powerful to give their money to the poor and take care of the needs of the helpless. When in our world we see injustice and cruelty remember this macronutrient from Jesus following in the tradition of the Hebrew Prophets: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, Micah 6:8

(Message) In other words, Be inspired to act because of the actions of Jesus”.

5. In Christ we are rooted in Joy. We are not planted in a grim, somber religion, but one where trees clap their hands, (Isaiah 55:12) where mourning turns to dancing (Psalm 31:11) and where God dances over God’s people with joy. (Zephaniah 3:17). Do you know the image of Jesus, smiling? I wish that were the image we all grew up with; that a smiling Jesus, not a frowning, severe one could be the image arising immediately at the sound of his name. Jesus smiling at the children, Jesus smiling at distributors of aid in central Puerto Rico. Jesus smiling at first responders in Las Vegas. Jesus smiling at you and me, just because.

6. And... in Christ most essentially, we are *rooted in Love*. A love that accepts us as we are, but doesn’t leave us that way (a cliché, but true). I heard recently that the primary reason many people come to church is to

be reminded what they forget words they may hear nowhere else.

“You are a beloved child of God”. You are precious and loved. In Christ we are rooted not in an ideology, but in a person, we are rooted in a relationship with one who desires what is best for us, who will celebrate with us our joys, and patiently work with us to transform our imperfections.

Rooted in Creation, Reconciliation, Hope, Justice, Joy, Love. These are qualities of the soil into which we are rooted. There are more. What would you put in the top six? To shift the metaphor, these nutrients are the foundation upon which Christians construct a life of generous gratitude. And that’s how we get to Stewardship.

During this Season of Stewardship, First... before you get to your wallet, remember where you are rooted. And be grateful.