

Sermon for November 8, 2020

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The prayer in Ephesians reads: *I pray that [God's] Spirit will make you become strong followers<sup>17</sup> and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God's] love.*

Stand firm and be deeply rooted...

I think of the song "We Shall Not Be Moved". "We're like a tree that's planted by the water, we shall not be moved."

When we think of roots we picture trees firmly planted, deeply rooted in the ground, stationary, stubbornly standing in one place, refusing to be moved. But today I want to challenge our understanding of our rootedness.

Stand firm and be deeply rooted... in what?

Our gospel text today is a text we usually hear in the weeks following Easter. The encounter takes place in the days following the crucifixion. It tells of the experience of two of Jesus' disciples. These two people have been with Jesus in his ministry on earth. They have stood with Jesus amidst the outcasts and the crowds. They have seen healing and abundance, watched justice and mercy lived out, heard the promises of God proclaimed. And while Jesus has NOT been secretive about his impending death, as disciples they have been pretty rooted in a pattern of following the living Jesus from town to town declaring the kingdom of God...in a place, in a people, in a plan.

Then Jesus is arrested. They watch as he is crucified and laid in the tomb. Frightened they hide in the upper room. They are unrooted. Their way of life has been upended, their plans no longer feasible.

These disciples leave the upper room and start out on the road: uprooted from the place they have celebrated a meal with Jesus, uprooted from the ministry they were doing and their plans for the future, uprooted from their hometowns and families, uprooted from their relationship to one another as fellow followers.

I picture them walking on that road – roots exposed, feeling they have no grounding.

As they walk, they talk about all that has happened. We have no place, we have no people, we have no purpose...

Then Jesus shows up alongside them, but they do not recognize him.

He says to them: What are you talking about as you walk along? I imagine him saying "Tell me about these exposed roots of yours".

The disciples share all that has happened in Jerusalem and to Jesus, and they end "but we had hoped he was the one who would redeem".

And Jesus responds "Oh how foolish and slow of heart..." And he begins to open up the scripture and proclaim once again the promises of God.

He brings them back to the Word to consider their roots.

He shares the Word that reveals the promised life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He points again to himself as the Living Word, God with us, indeed the one who redeems and fulfills hopes beyond the grave.

As they approach the upcoming town, the disciples sense something in Jesus and they plead "Stay with us".

And as he sits at the table, breaks the bread and shares the wine, their eyes are opened to see that it is indeed Jesus...resurrected, with them, redeeming.

"Were not our hearts burning within us on the road?" They reply. "Did our roots not tingle?"

For the disciples know in that moment that they were not ever really rooted to a plan, or to a place, or to group of people, or even to their perceived purpose BUT rather they were rooted in Christ alone.

They had always had mobile roots – roots that promised to hold them no matter what was happening around them, no matter where they found themselves planted, roots deep beyond what is visible or feasible, roots that even promised to hold them beyond death. For their roots remained in Christ alone.

After Jesus departs in physical form, the disciples head back on the road and return to Jerusalem. And for a minute you think – ok, Jesus has told them to return to their place, to their people, to their plan and stand firm, stubbornly

holding their ground. BUT instead, firmly rooted in Christ and Christ's mission alone, they return to the old place and people, only long enough to share the good news and remind others of their own rootedness before they are sent out into the world, on new roads, living out the new plans in the Spirit.

We are all feeling a little unrooted at the moment. We have been uprooted from our normal spaces, uprooted from our people groups. We have had our plans upended. Our roots feel exposed. We are frantic to find familiar ground and replant ourselves where we can firmly and stubbornly stand stationary.

BUT I wonder as we now wander out on our unexpected road, if Jesus isn't standing right with us, opening up scripture and reminding us of our real roots in Christ alone. Do we mumble "But we had hoped... this does not look like redemption..." Is Jesus whispering "Oh how foolish and slow of heart... I AM here. Your roots are in me. Despite place, people, plan...I hold you firm. Open your eyes. Feel your roots."

Picture yourself, wherever you are, whatever surrounds you, roots deeply dug into Christ Jesus - mobile roots, capable of holding through any storm...even death.

Let us hesitate to rush back into familiar ground in hopes of feeling secure in place, people, plan. Instead let us gain confidence in our mobile rootedness in Christ and wonder – deeply rooted in this BOUNDLESS God what unexpected adventure, in which to share the good news and hope in the one that redeems, lies ahead?

*I pray that [God's] Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup>and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God's] love.*

Stand firm and be deeply rooted...remember in whom you are rooted.