

“Rooted: What and Why?”

OT: Psalm 63:1-8

NT: John 15:1-11

Like in most of Jesus’ stories, he is saying what he is saying to teach something. In this case, he is telling the disciples the key to their life without his physical presence. He has just told them about the advocate, the Holy Spirit, and offered them his peace. He then offers his last bold declaration about himself.

John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. **Abide in me as I abide in you.** Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it **abides in** the vine, neither can you unless you **abide in** me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who **abide in** me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not **abide in** me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you **abide in** me, and my words **abide in** you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; **abide in** my love. If you keep my commandments, you will **abide in** my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and **abide in** his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

What did you hear? What do you think Jesus is teaching? His imagery is beautiful and elegant, but his message is rock solid and packs a life-changing punch of importance. It is like the disciples just received the secret ingredient to generations of great grandma’s favorite spaghetti sauce. Jesus tells the disciples to abide!!!

The term abide means to remain and stay. It references the continuing condition of a person or a thing. In other places in the New Testament it is used as Jesus instructs his disciples “to stay here and keep watch with me (Mt. 26:38)” and Paul uses it to encourage newly converted Christians as they were tempted “remain in the situation which you were in when God called you (1 Cor. 7:20, 24).” Here in John the term is used to describe the perseverance of believers in their relation to Christ.

It is likely we have heard sermons and messages before that encourage us to “abide.” We hear them, but have we embodied those encouragements? Do we “abide”, remain, and stay, with Christ? I must admit that in this question I am not simply asking whether we remain close by Christ, like in a social distancing fashion. I am asking whether we “abide in”? Jesus says “I AM the true vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much

fruit.” We are called to “abide in” Christ and have Christ “abide in” us. This is more than an affiliation with Christ. This is more than Christ being an acquaintance. This is more than a touch and go situation. This is even more than a holding on to with the ability to let go whenever we want. To “abide in” means to connect, strap in, latch on, endure (put a stake in), and depend on. Do we “abide in” Christ?

From today through the month of August, we are going to be digging deeper into what it means to “abide in” Christ: a.k.a. to be “ROOTED.” Our goal throughout these next several weeks will be to unpack faith and life, church and culture, practice and emotion, all the while keeping in mind the imagery of what it means to be “ROOTED” and why being “ROOTED” is so important for us and our faith.

Our first question is what? What are roots? To answer this, the most natural place to turn is to look at the life cycle of a plant.

For a plant, the primary function of root is water absorption. The secondary function is giving mechanical support to the plant; an ability to stand tall and firm. If a plant does not have roots it will not be able to survive as none of the things in its life cycle will happen properly.

Just to be clear, there are plants without roots. And I do not know about you, but they are not my favorite. As a matter of fact, most of us likely try to get rid of them if they appear in our yards or walkways. The plant I am referring to is moss. Mosses grow in damp places and soak up the water and minerals they need directly from their environment. They anchor themselves to rocks and trees with rhizoids, thread-like growths that are not roots. These and other examples of the simplest types of plants do not have roots.

But as we think about roots, we may not only think about plants. Families have roots. Businesses have roots. Traditions and customs have roots. Neighborhoods have roots. Culture has roots. Words have roots. Or this one: What has roots that nobody sees, is taller than trees, up, up it goes, yet it never grows? Mountains... Mountains have roots. And our faith must have roots. Being ROOTED in matters of faith is where our attention will be over the next several weeks.

Our second question, which adds more to the meaning of what roots are, is why roots are important?

To answer this, we should look back at Jesus’ charge in John 15. At the end he explains himself, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” That is an awesome thing. Our joy can be complete. How? “Abide in”, remain, and stay in Christ. Be ROOTED in Christ.

I would add here that “joy” is just part of the picture of completeness. What does the whole picture look like? Paul’s letter to the Galatians helps paint that picture including “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (5:22-23).” These are the fruits of the Spirit we bear from the faith roots we establish. This is how we know whether our roots exist and whether we are rooted enough. It is simple really. If rooted, our life will bear the true love, joy, and peace of Christ. If not, we may be able to bear some fraction of love, joy, and peace, but we will not be able to witness these things in the true way God has intended for us.

Barrett and I were listening to a podcast yesterday in the car on our way to hike Sharp Top mountain and the person being interviewed offered a profound reflection of herself. She stated that “in looking back on my past life now, I couldn’t figure out whether I was always an irresponsible person finally acting responsible, or whether I was always a responsible person just acting irresponsibly.” Brothers and sisters, we are born in the image of Christ with the ability and responsibility, throughout our whole lives, to abide in Christ so that we can and will, throughout our whole lives, own the responsibility of being instruments of the Spirit’s most prized fruits. Are we always going to get it right? No. Are we going to need some help and redirecting along the way? Yes, without a doubt. But having our faith rooted in Christ gives us a much better chance than cutting corners with anything or anyone else.

According to Jesus’ message in John 15, we, the branches, must have Christ, the vine, to live? Therefore, the principal benefit of abiding in Christ is Christ will abide in us. How?

- By His word, teaching, instructing, directing, strengthening, supporting, encouraging, comforting us (Rom 15:4);
- By His Spirit, in His witness as a Spirit of adoption, and in His fruits (Rom 8:15; Gal 5:22-23);
- By the efficacy of His body and blood (John 6:56-57);
- By His indwelling presence, as our “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30);
- By permitting us to have fellowship with Him (Rev 3:20). (Pastor Robert Chew)

Another reason why roots are important is stability.

On top of North Sugarloaf Mountain in New Hampshire, the trees cannot put down their roots very deep, presumably because the soil is so rocky. There is probably a granite slab a couple feet under the soil. The result is that instead of putting down deep roots, the tree’s roots spread out just under the surface.

When the high winds come (and believe me, they get very high winds in the White Mountains!), even though the tree is alive, it has no stability in its roots to withstand the blast. The result is tragic for the tree; it simply tips over, exposing the underside of its very shallow root system.

I began thinking then of how very much like us this tree is. For us, it can be tempting to put down very shallow roots in our lives. Why? Speculatively, because shallow roots are easier. They do not require as much work. They do not require us to put off what we want in order to gain what we need. They do not require us to choose obedience in difficult circumstances, only the easy ones. They do not require us to choose honesty even when we know it will hurt us. They do not require us to choose compassion over unkindness. They do not require us to choose humility over pride. They do not require us to choose a strong work ethic over laziness or procrastination. They do not require us to have patience over grasping what we want now. They do not require us to choose generosity over selfishness.

Again speculatively, life has become more about finding what is convenient, fun, and enjoyable, rather than choosing what is right no matter what the circumstances, and no matter what the cost. This is the way of shallow roots. If I choose the easy way over the right way, maybe only me will notice that I am not living the way I should, but when the storms come, I won't be ready for them!

Just like a tree cannot wait for the storm to come before it puts down deep roots, because then it is already too late, so it is with us. We need deep roots now, so when the storm comes, we will be unmovable and unshakable. (Biblical Illuminations.com, Douglas, June 23, 2010)

One could argue that all of nature depends on hidden resources. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. Even the mountains form far below the earth's surface before bursting into the clouds. The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system ...

As God's own, our hearts are made for a desire to have an intimate relationship with Christ. We are made to long for fellowship with God. David reflects his desire and longing to be rooted when he prays, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1). David earnestly seeks God. His soul thirsts for God. There is desperation. There is urgency. In whom will David find himself? In whom will David quench his thirst? In whom will David receive life? God, but not just because David knows God's name or passes God occasionally on the street. David must be rooted.

One commentator asks a series of questions for us, the readers, to ponder in reflection of David's cry to God: Do we seek God like this? Do we desire God in this manner? Is there any part of David's cry that you recognize in your heart?

A mother was at a special Mother's Day Tea with her daughter. While sitting at the table, letting her tea bag sit in the hot water, she watched as her daughter kept dipping and pulling her bag in and out of the water. As she watched, the mother believed it was just the right time to share with her daughter what her mother had shared with her at a tea party like that one several years earlier.

The mother began by telling of the first time she had tea with the little girl's grandmother. The then mother, now grandmother, took her tea bag and let it sit in the hot water, while the then daughter, now mother, was dipping and pulling away her bag. She was dipping it in and out from the cup because she was afraid to allow the bag to sit too long because then the tea might become too strong.

The now mother then repeated the very important lesson her mother told her. There are two ways to drink tea. Some people are dippers. They dip their tea bag up and down in the mug. A lot of Christians are like that. They dip in on Sunday morning then dip back out. They dip back in on Wednesday night then they dip back out. But there is another way to drink tea and that is to be an abider. It involves the act of just dropping the tea bag in the water and letting it stay there. Without touching the bag an amazing thing will happen. The color of the water begins to change as the influence of the bag in the hot water effects change in the cup. A person can just sit and watch the transformation take place because of the act of abiding.

When you are a dipper you have got to make things happen by your own effort. You have got to move the bag up and down, dip a spoon in and out of the cup, wrap the string around the spoon, jerk, and then pull. It can require a lot of human effort. But when you are abiding, the water changes all by itself. That is exactly what happens when you abide. The depth of your abiding will determine the rate of your progress in the spiritual life. Jesus wants you to stay there and experience the full strength of His presence.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus wants us to "abide in" him; to be "ROOTED".

Let all God's people say... Amen.