

Read Luke 10: 25-37 and 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, Paul's final farewell words to the church in Corinth, and our liturgical celebration of Trinity Sunday all share something very important in common. Relationship.

Today, on this fifth visit in our "Rooted" series this summer, we are making what I think is the most important stop on our journey. Today we are talking about "ROOTED in Relationship".

Andrew Mills talks about the power of relationship in a Ted Talk:

"The single and most powerful force on the planet, something that is invisible, something we all probably have, and something that shapes our life in countless ways that we might not realize, discount or dismiss... are relationships, friendships, connections." He says, "it sounds a little like a My Little Pony episode." (or I would add Sesame Street- I watched Sesame Street as a kid and I learned a lot about relationships through that show- Did any of you watch the CNN Town Hall yesterday with Sesame Street? Coming Together: Stand up to Racism. It was all about how we are called to relate to each other, especially others of a different skin tone. Topics like inclusion, empathy, racism, equality, and white privilege were discussed. I thought they did a good job with kids asking questions and having Sesame Street characters like Big Bird (my favorite) to share what we can do to help change the toxicity of racism in America.) But back to Mills Ted Talk. He says, "relationships are something we talk to our kids about but not something we think of for us as mature adults." He continues, "when we discount, dismiss, or sideline relationships, we are pushing aside the most important thing in our lives." Mills charge is powerful "Do not dismiss, discount, or devalue the relationships of those sitting around you right now. They account for so much of you. We need to invest and care for the people around us long term."

"Happy, healthy, and whole lives come from good relationships, friendships, and connections. It is scientifically proven that a person with good relationships is less likely to have a cold, more likely to recover faster from surgery, two to five times less likely to have a major health challenge in life, and more likely to live longer than other people. *And this was mind boggling to me.* Not having close relationships is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

“The fact of life is we need people who will journey with us in life, not just for a while, but long term. People we know and people who know us.” Mills builds his talk around the belief that “**your friends account for as much as 90% of your success or failure in life.** (Repeat) Relationships drive our world: we are wired for story, connection, and created for relationships.” Mills quotes Andrew root who said “We are our relationships. They are the core of our existence and source of life.”

“We need to foster the depth of relationships. The tension is that we have what are known as “friendly’s”; people who know about us but not what is within us. Jen Michel Pollock believes ‘Our relationships have grown broader (social media) but shallower.’ What we need is people who know not just our names and what we did on the weekend but know our inside thoughts, struggles, and workings.”

“Sometimes in life, when we encounter difficulty, we make some bad choices. And when we do, we need people to come alongside us for the long haul; someone who will listen with care and purpose and presence. In many cases, relationships can actually save people!!”

“We can be a part of rescuing and healing and pulling people toward a future. How? Value the people around you!!! If we are in difficulty, what we want is someone to walk with us and be with us. And if we are busting and exploding and moving excitedly in life, what we also want is someone to be with us to share it with.”

“Relationships are life! Not sideline to life. They give us life and help us get through life.”

“This may seem simple, but relationships are radical and revolutionary. Our world is into disposable everything and this includes relationships. The truth is you can have everything in life (power, fame, money, good looks), but if you don’t have relationships, friendships, connections, you won’t have anything.” *Just ask Lightning McQueen in the Disney Pixar movie Cars.*

“How then do we develop relationships, friendships, and connections? Two things: **Invest**, commit for the long haul even before you know what will come of it and **Care**, listen and don’t just wait to say the next thing. The power of relationship is that we can change the world by changing someone’s world around us.” (Andrew Mills, Ted Talk)

I mentioned a moment ago that today is Trinity Sunday. As reformed Christians, we celebrate Trinity Sunday the Sunday immediately following Pentecost and immediately preceding the longest stretch of ordinary time. We refer to Ordinary Time as the season of growth. Trinity Sunday at its core serves to remind us of just how rooted in relationship we are as God’s children. We are rooted in relationship because the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us is rooted in relationship. We call the nature of this relationship for God the Trinity.

One of our most core beliefs as Christians is that God is God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that God is Jesus, Jesus is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet God is not Jesus, Jesus is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not God. *Only with the Trinity, right?* When we look closely at God as the Trinity, we discover the utmost in relationship dynamics. Each person works towards one goal. Each has their purpose and acts to the fulfillment of their purpose. Each respects the other and trusts the other to do what their nature is. The Trinity sets the example for our understanding and hope of relationship with one another.

The way God acts in three persons is how we are to act in our relationships with others. We are all to work toward one goal; to glorify and love God. We all have a purpose empowered with the spiritual gifts to fulfill our purpose. We are all to respect each other and trust each other. But I believe the only way we can all accomplish this full embodiment of relationship is to root ourselves first in relationship with God.

In talking about relationship, the cross, with both a vertical post and horizontal post, is a great image for us to consider.

To dig deeper into this, let us look at the parable of the Good Samaritan. The premise of the encounter on the road takes place in a dialogue between Jesus and a lawyer who wants to know what it takes to get into heaven. The answer is the *Shema*, the great commandment, to first love God with all you are. Not some part of you but all of you, and to love your neighbor. There is a reason they are in that order. God helps us in how to love our neighbor. The rest of the parable answers the lawyer's question "And who exactly is my neighbor?" Three people pass by the man who has been battered and beaten and robbed. The two we might think would be most likely the ones to stop, the priest because well, he was a priest and why wouldn't a priest go out of his way to help, and the Levite because well, it is presumed the man wounded was one of his kind, kept on going without what seems to be a care. Now the third is a Samaritan, a powerful stereotype that day meaning an outsider, and it is he who stops to help. And not only does he help, he invests and goes the extra mile. A man was hurt, and it was going to take the investment and care and mercy of another man to save his life.

My takeaway from the parable of the Good Samaritan is that **in true love empowered by God, relationship is formed by barriers being broken down for the sake and joy of unity and wholeness.** (*Repeat*)

The vertical post is defined by "you shall love the Lord your God" and represents our relationship with God from the ground up. When talking about relationships, friendships, and connections being the source of life, we must first put up the vertical post. Why? Our relationship with God is necessary to yield true love, joy, peace, reconciliation, power, guidance, purpose, belonging, hope, and salvation. We are not able to find these things in any

other source. God is the true source of these and therefore, if we want to live a life of love and joy and peace with others, sparked by purpose and belonging and hope and salvation, we must be rooted and abide with Christ, the true vine. It is then, and only then, that we are filled with the power enough to accomplish building relationship with others.

The horizontal post hangs on the vertical post. Without the vertical post, the horizontal post falls to the ground. The horizontal post is defined by “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And who is your neighbor? Any fellow human being you pass by. ANY fellow human being you pass by. How do we do this? First, we find our source for love in God and stop trying to create our own version. Second, we embrace the example of Jesus who came to save ALL. Third, we surrender to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and do what is right in the eyes of God. Fourth, we care for one another, especially those who are being unfairly treated or cast aside.

Barrett sent a short video in a family group text this week that really struck me the more I thought about it. It was two basketball players from the same team. One had just missed a shot or made a mistake, something, and turned toward the other end of the floor with their head hanging low and walking. A teammate came behind and took their hand and lifted the other players head up. Barrett’s tag to the video was “This is the kind of friend I want.” I found this to be powerful in a couple ways.

The most obvious is the pick me up from a teammate. We all most certainly need this from time to time. And to have a friend who is willing and able to help us lift our face is a true blessing.

Not so obvious is the theological meaning behind the action of “lifting one’s face.” One of the first things we do when we have messed up in some way is to drop our head in shame. Whether we do this with our face or with our heart, our sin against God causes our face and our heart to drop. Our shame prevents us from looking up to God purely and confidently and not being able to look up and see eye to eye effects our relationship. We begin to self-contain and shut down. What does God do then? When we sin and our head hangs in shame, the good news of the gospel is that God comes along, grabs our chin, and raises our face up to see eye to eye again. God gives us a state of confidence by giving us a second (or hundredth) chance.

With our heads up, we can see other people and not just ourselves. To have a friend, relationship, and connection, we must be a friend. For a friendship, relationship, and connection to work, for us to know who our neighbor is and love them, our heads need to be up to see others. And I mean really see others; enough to say something, do something, and be someone to them. And do not we want other people’s heads to be up as well, so we too can be someone to someone else.

Tara Joyce wrote an article on the power of relationships and in it she says “Every relationship you develop, from the most casual to the most intimate, serves to help you become more conscious. You are taught to honor others, yet often this is one of the most difficult acts you can perform. For not only does it require you, first and foremost, to honor yourself, it also requires you to come to know yourself. In a larger sense, your relationships are spiritual messengers that bring into your life revelations about your own strengths and weaknesses.”

“The most important property of humankind is the capacity to form and maintain relationships. These relationships are absolutely necessary for any of us to survive, learn, work, love and procreate. Human relationships take many forms but the most intense, most pleasurable and most painful are those relationships with family, friends and loved ones.”

(Dr. Bruce Perry)

In a follow-up to MENTOR’s 2014 report, *The Mentoring Effect*, which is the most comprehensive look at young people’s views on and engagement with mentoring, the author offers “At a time when much of the focus is on what divides us, this study shows that there is something the majority of Americans agree on: mentoring relationships are powerful tools for connection and are critical to our country’s future.”

For me, mentoring happened with my parents, youth group leaders, Sunday school teachers, fellow church members, teachers, and coaches. These were the most important people to my understanding of life. They still are today. Research shows that youth who have a minimum of 5 adult mentors outside their family structure are more likely to have a higher self-esteem and be more effective in school and life. Youth: Think about who it is you listen to and trust. Who are you surrounded by and who are your mentors? Need someone? Come find me. I will walk with you and I will introduce you to others. Adults: In what ways are you a mentor to a youth or a young adult? If you do not feel as though you are, come find me and I will get you connected right away.

When it comes to being ROOTED in Relationship, I would be remiss today if I did not discuss God’s intended purpose of harmony. From the beginning, God created humanity to be in harmony with God, creation, and one another. Well, things happened, and harmony was lost. Here is the thing. I love a good choral ensemble or orchestra playing in harmony with one another. I love to watch a sports team gel and play with grace and harmony. However, I do not enjoy and will likely leave and go somewhere else if a choral ensemble or orchestra can’t tune in to one another and it is one of the hardest things I have ever done to watch a full game of a sports team that can’t get it together. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the disarray of humanity displayed by so many different acts of inhumane destruction is ugly and unacceptable in God’s eyes. It is not what God intended for us. It is not what God wants.

Paul tells us “Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

Another word for restoration is reconciliation. We need to reconcile our differences and seek peace. And by peace, I mean well-being for all. God has done it for us, and God asks those of us who believe to work toward reconciliation with others. And God does not just mean with those we hang out with on the weekends.

How do we do this? Lift your head. Be aware. See others, especially those being unfairly treated or cast aside. Be seen by others. Encourage one another. Invest long term. Care and listen. I will leave whether you greet people with a holy kiss up to you.

One of the best gifts I think Barrett has given our children is the charge to be aware. When they go to school or the playground, she asks them, “What are you going to do if you see someone who doesn’t have someone to play with?” The answer, “Go play with them.” Hey, we got to start somewhere.

Be ROOTED in relationship: with God the creator, redeemer, and sustainer, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with one another. Brothers and sisters in Christ, value the people around you!! All your neighbors around you!!

Let all God’s people say... Amen.