

## New Hope Sermon 07 15 18 Rooted and built up

Let's repeat our text today in the NLT: *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. <sup>7</sup> Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

What strikes me about this passage is the number of active verbs: *accept* Christ, *continue to follow* Him, roots *grow down*, live *built up*, faith *grow strong*, overflow with thankfulness. These verbs are the believer's responsibility and describe the normal Christian life from God's perspective.

William Woodfin said, "The proof of Christianity is not a book but a life. The power of Christianity is not a creed but a Christian character; and wherever you see life that has been transformed by the grace of God, you see a witness to the resurrection of Jesus." *William M. Woodfin, Leadership, Vol. 8, no. 1.* But we can live that resurrected life as Jesus the Lord lives it through us.

Our culture celebrates the people who seem successful – with prestigious jobs and healthy bank accounts. God celebrates the people who are growing to be like Christ. As Fred Smith says, "I don't think God is interested in our success. He is interested in our maturity." *Fred Smith, Leadership, Vol. 2, no. 3.*

So how does maturity in Christ happen? It starts with receiving Christ. For too long, we've called unbelievers to "invite Jesus into your life." Jesus doesn't want to be in your life. Your life's a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn't boring or purposeless or static. It's wild and exhilarating and unpredictable. *Russell Moore, "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," Christianity Today (February 2012)*

Our job is to live in His life. How do we do that? Let's start with our roots.

Science writer Hope Jahren shares how a tiny seed starts to put down roots—the most essential thing for a plant's survival. She writes, 'No risk is more terrifying than that taken by the first root. A lucky root will eventually find water, but its first job is to anchor ... Once the first root is extended, the plant will face frost, drought, and greedy jaws without any possibility of flight.

If the seed does take root, it can go down twelve, thirty, forty meters. The results are powerful. The tree's roots can "swell and split bedrock, and move gallons of water daily for years, much more efficiently than any pump yet invented by man." If the root takes root, then the plant becomes all but indestructible: "Tear apart everything aboveground—everything—and most plants can still grow rebelliously back from just one intact root. More than once. More than twice." *Hope Jahren, Lab Girl (Kopf, 2016), pages 45-46*

The key for Christian growth in Colossians 2:6 is: *Let your roots grow down into him.*" That's the root in which we anchor.

This is gardening season – a joy for those of us in Chicago who love all things green and colorful. So helping plants thrive is what gets us out there tending to them every day. I love seeing Evan go out with all his equipment: his straw hat, shoes, gloves, watering can and spade to tend his vegetables. He is a good framer and his plants are thriving. For the plants to grow, first however, they had to be put into good earth that had been dug up, cultivated and fertilized. Rich deep soil helps the plants to get established. They also have to have sun to thrive but if we have as much sun and heat as we've had recently in Chicago, they have to be watered twice a day to keep from heat stroke. The water seeps down into the soil and nourishes the roots, counteracting strong sun that will dry out the soil. As the roots go down deeper into the soil, they also branch out – seeking more water and moisture and anchoring the plant against the wind or other elements from above the ground. That's the growth process according to Gardening 101 - the roots keep going down and branching out.

Farming was a big concern in Palestine in Jesus's day, so I'm sure most people understood his message in the parable of the sower and the soils. Jesus teaches that seeds that fell on a beaten path, on rocky places and among weeds and thorns didn't thrive. Most died – scorched by sunstroke because they had only a shallow root or crowded out by the weeds and thorns which took all the plant's nurture. Only the seed planted on good soil which could send its roots down deep, and thrive (Mt. 13:1-8, 18-23). So what are the rocks or thorns or weeds in our lives? Rocks can symbolize the unresolved issues of woundedness, anger, and bitterness that block God's love from taking root deep within us. The thorns and weeds can be "the cares and pleasures of the world," as the Bible says, and our addiction to entertainment, to endless smartphone texting and surfing, or worry, fear, stress and anxiety disorder that make us self-absorbed. When we are focused on any of these issues they compete with the Holy Spirit within us and choke out His work.

So we must pray for a good heart that is freed from these distractions and enemies to our spiritual life. To make sure God is at our center today, let's sing right now: "Create in me a clean heart."

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Repeat.  
Cast me not away from your presence O Lord and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and renew a right spirit within me.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

Words and music: John Carter

With a heart free, our roots can go into Christ and draw all our resources for grace and power and wisdom directly from Him. Although all believers are connected to Christ when we put our faith in Him, deep rootedness is needed if Christ himself is an inexhaustible source of grace and life. We don't just tap lightly into Christ; we are nurtured by His life and character.

That nurture also becomes our stability because remember the roots not only go down deep, they branch out. This is what the Bible calls being grounded in Christ. The spreading roots anchor the plant and provide a solid foundation for the plant. Then the plant can be built up, just as Paul says and we can grow into Christ-likeness. Our Christian life will be like the seed growing among rocks and thorns and weeds if we try to become like Christ in our own strength. But the Spirit in us becomes the watering can Evan uses every day as it takes the words of Scripture and weaves them deep into our hearts. And so it is said, "A Bible that's falling apart probably belongs to someone who isn't." *Christian Johnson. Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1.*

Still, it's the Word combined with the Spirit that is needed. "All Word and no Spirit, we dry up; all Spirit and no Word, we blow up; both Word and Spirit, we grow up. (David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979). Let me repeat that so it can sink into our consciousness: All Word and no Spirit, we dry up; all Spirit and no Word, we blow up; both Word and Spirit, we grow up. The Spirit nurtures us with God's love poured into our hearts the Spirit make the Word live in us. And the Spirit and the Word together tell us how to pour that love out for others unconditionally.

But there's another part to this growing spiritual life besides the rooting and grounding by the Spirit. We are to grow strong in faith and overflow with thankfulness.(Col.2:7). How does that happen – often through adversity. Every conscientious gardener has to face the adverse weather conditions and insects and critters who want to destroy the plant and so guards against these things. Evan has just made a homemade brew to put on his cucumber to protect them from marauding bugs.

For the Christian adversity comes in the form of pitfalls, overt storms, many sidetracking issues that cause us to neglect the Word and refuse the Spirit's promptings, and disobedience and self-sufficiency. God uses all these storms and challenges to toughen us up and make our roots go down deeper into Christ to anchor us.

The process is not unlike that between a mother Angola giraffe and its newborn. Gary Richmond writes:

“The Angola giraffe was giving birth. I stood next to zoo animal keeper, Jack Badal, to watch. She was standing up, and the calf’s front hooves and head were already visible. “When is she going to lie down?” I asked Jack.

“She won’t,” he answered.

“But her hindquarters are nearly ten feet off the ground!” I said. “Isn’t anyone going to catch the calf?”

“Try catching it if you want,” Jack responded, “but its mother has enough strength in her hind legs to kick your head off.” Soon the calf hurled forth, landing on his back. His mother waited for about a minute, then kicked her baby, sending it sprawling head over hooves.

“Why’d she do that?” I asked.

“She wants it to get up.” Whenever the baby ceased struggling to rise, the mother prodded it with a hearty kick. Finally, the calf stood—wobbly, but upright. The mother kicked it off its feet again! “She wants it to remember how it got up,” Jack offered. “In the wild, if it didn’t quickly follow the herd, predators would pick it off.” It’s easy for us to view trials as unwelcome intruders in our lives. But they do have a way of prompting us to get up and seek the protection of our heavenly father. *Gary Richmond, “It’s a Jungle Out There,” found in Men of Integrity (12-15-2004)*

The kicking of a mother giraffe to toughen up her baby so it makes it through its most vulnerable time in the wild does not sound positive. Yet Paul continues to describe the Christian life “*as strengthened in the faith in which you were taught, overflowing in thanksgiving*.” When we weather various trials and struggles with God’s help, it creates a thankful spirit. And as we grow stronger and stronger in faith – again because of the gracious work on God in our lives, that also nurtures a thankful spirit.

Kent Hughes has said, wisely,

Thankfulness is a good test of our spiritual state. A thankless spirit betrays a life which is no longer focusing on the greatness of Christ. It is looking down, not up. Thankful hearts herald spiritual health” (Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, Colossians and Philemon*, Crossway Books, 1989, p. 63).

So here is a summary of the normal Christian life, the life God is seeking to develop in each of His children. *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. <sup>7</sup> Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

This passage needs to go along with other passages for spiritual growth and health in the Bible. And they are all connected to plants:

Jeremiah 17:7-8: *The one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him 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 worried in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit”* (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Psalm 1:1-3: *“Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but who take delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on his law day and night – [this is a description of the plant putting its roots down deep into Christ and His Word. Then notice the promise of growth]: They are like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.”*

And John 15:4-5 *No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him or her, s/he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

A life that does not wither in a year of drought; a life that prospers and bears fruit; a life connected to Christ the vine. That the kind of purposeful, fruitful life of thanksgiving I want to lead, and that God makes possible, beloved. With growth like that we become the living Bibles for all to read.

Let’s pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 7/15/18