

**TO THE SAINTS IN WALLACE
ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE**

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As my wife can attest, yard work is not high on my list of favorite activities!

However, when directed, I can be of some use when we work in the yard. Saturday a week ago, I asked Nancy, “What needs to be done?” and she said, “You can help me re-plant that yew shrub over by the storage shed and move the Hosta plants to the side of the house.” As Nancy gave me directions, I carefully dug around the roots of the Hostas so as not to damage them, then divided the big clump into five smaller bundles. Next, I got that space ready to re-plant the yew shrub. “You don’t have to dig it too deep, but you need to make it wide enough so all of the roots can fit,” she explained. So, we carefully placed the shrub in the ground and made sure we covered the wide and dense mass of roots. Then we planted the Hostas on the east side of the house. “These holes don’t need to be as deep or as big as the other hole,” Nancy told me. “After we’re done planting, you can water everything” – and she explained the best way to do that to the yew shrub and the Hostas. So, you see, I can do yardwork!

The function and purpose of a plant’s or tree’s root system is pretty obvious, but it doesn’t hurt to be reminded how important that root system is. Here is a good description: “A plant’s health is very closely tied to its roots. With plants, the essential functions that a root provides are in supporting health, growth, and development. When roots are weak or diseased, the whole plant has difficulties. The roots need to be constantly growing in order to stay healthy. The root system serves some important functions. The roots absorb water and minerals that a plant needs to live. The roots anchor the plant to the ground and support the above ground part of the plant. The roots store food that has been made through photosynthesis. This food can be used later when a plant needs it to grow or survive.”¹

As we wind up this August sermon series on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, after hearing from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount in June and July, this image of “roots” is a good way to think about what it means for us to live and thrive and grow and serve as a community of believers, encouraged to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called as beloved children of God. Thinking about those Hostas and that yew shrub and remembering the vital importance of the root system to the health, growth, and survival of a plant, listen again to what Paul says when he prays for the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus, including you and me: “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.” (Ephesians 3:16-17)

While Paul mixes his metaphors here – a healthy root system and a firm foundation – the idea is pretty clear. He prays for believers to be “firmly rooted” in the love of Jesus. Just out of interest, I did a Google search on that phrase, “firmly rooted.” It should come as no surprise that numerous gardening and landscaping websites showed up, including Firmly Rooted, a certified organic vegetable farm in Belgrave, Ontario, the Firmly Rooted Flower Farm in Clayton, Georgia, and Firmly Rooted Landscaping in Weare, New Hampshire. The significance of the names Firmly Rooted Soundsystem Company in Bristol, United Kingdom and Firmly Rooted Digital Marketing Company in Phoenix, Arizona wasn’t quite as obvious, although the latter did advertise “building strong foundations every business needs to grow.”

One organization that was a bit different was the Firmly Rooted AAU Basketball Organization for youth ages 8-16, in Oakland, California. That organization’s motto is “Keeping family first enhances good mental health and the spirit of community.”

The mission of the Firmly Rooted Counseling and Consulting Center in Davidson, North Carolina is “to provide mental health treatment with a goal of creating a healthier community through healthier individuals and families.” As you might expect, there were plenty of Firmly Rooted church ministries of all kinds listed on Google.

In Mobile, Alabama, there is a gathering place called the Rooted and Grounded Coffee House. The two women who founded the coffee house explain their mission this way: “We believe as lovers of Jesus, we are called to be deeply rooted in Christ.

When we as human beings have access to His living water, we can be filled to the fullness of God. Our hope is to create a safe place for people to come and experience the Father, for us to be a community of people whose desire is to be intimate with the Father and to be deeply rooted in His love for us. When you leave Rooted and Grounded, our hope is for you ‘to know the knowledge – [the] surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all of the fullness of God.’”²

Being rooted and grounded in love with Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith reminds us that none of this is our own doing. Paul always reminds us of that in every way, even in how he writes his letters. Typically, he spends the first half of his letter talking about all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ – grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, baptism, resurrection, and so on. In the second half, Paul answers the question, “So what does that have to do with our lives?” He shares his ethics, his instructions and exhortations about how to live together as Christians in the faith community and in the world. That’s why you’ll often see words such as therefore, so then, because of this, since, for this reason, etc. when Paul begins teaching us how to live as Christians, to live lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

To live that kind of life, we need to take in nourishment through our roots. The owners of the Rooted and Grounded Coffee House talk about having access to the living water of Jesus. Just as the yew shrub and Hostas need to be watered to thrive, so do we. And the roots also absorb the nutrients needed for health and growth. That’s why we might call Jesus’s love the Miracle-Gro that we need.

Not surprisingly, since the culture of Jesus’s and Paul’s day was largely agrarian, there are plenty of references to planting and growing in the Bible, including the New Testament. For example, in other letters, Paul writes, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and

established in the faith” (Colossians 2:6-7) and “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6)

And Paul always emphasizes love as the essential ingredient in everything we do. Here are just a few examples:

- “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels . . . if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries . . . and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains . . . and if I hand over my body so that I may boast . . . but do not have love, I am nothing and I gain nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
- “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive one another. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Colossians 3:12-14)
- “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:13-14)
- “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandments are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:8-10)

You can’t really hear it in the English in today’s epistle lesson, but every time Paul says “you,” he means “y’all” and “all y’all.” This Christian life that we’re called to live out is about a whole lot more than just “me and Jesus.” Paul wrote his letter “To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.” We have been hearing Paul’s instructions as the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus. It’s always about community. It’s always about being the people of God. It’s always about all of us together being rooted and grounded in Jesus’s love, so we can comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ and be filled with the fullness of God.

The majestic redwood trees of Northern California are a type of Sequoia tree. These trees can live up to 3,000 years and reach heights of 300+ feet (a 30-story building). A Sequoia tree can have a base diameter of up to 35 feet and is thought to be the largest living organism on Earth. You would expect such massive trees would have taproots that would grow very deep into the ground to provide nutrients and stability. Well, it turns out that these giants have roots that are only 6-12 feet deep. Nevertheless, they are sturdy and strong because their roots run sidewise and interlock with one another, until the whole root system becomes one massive support system. One description says, “They are literally holding each other up. The trees grow in close proximity to each other so they can share nutrients and physically support each other.”³

What a wonderful image of what and who we can be and are called to be as the saints in Wallace, beloved children of God, who are trying to be faithful in Christ. With Christ dwelling in our hearts, from whom we get the nutrients we need to grow and thrive, we can be rooted and grounded in love. And when we doubt that we can do it, when we begin to feel our roots dry up and start to wither, we can remember how Paul points us always to God: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through your Spirit. May Christ dwell in our hearts through faith. May we always be rooted and grounded in love and know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Amen.

NOTES

¹ “Root Anatomy,” at www.campbell.k12.ky.us/userfiles/11756/Classes67703/Roots.pdf.

² www.randgcoffeehouse.com.

³ Molly Grisham, “How Deep Are Your Roots?” at www.mollygrisham.com.