

## “Rooted and Grounded in Love”

*Fourth in a series on Being a Tree of Life*

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Ephesians 3:14-21

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Disruption. Acceleration. Collapse. Disoriented. Worried. Spinning. Numbing. Grieving. Afraid. Confused.

Intrigued. Wondering. *Maybe? Just maybe? Could this work? Might this be a way ahead?*

*No, probably not. I don't know. I'm tired, and tired of being tired. Grumpy.*

*Help, God. Please. Help. God?*

This is my inner voice. Also, the pandemic as we're ending (I hope) this 4<sup>th</sup> wave? (Or is it the 5<sup>th</sup>?) Also, being a church-congregation this days. Of course, that's all tangled with pandemic-stuff. And inner voices.

Last time, I compared being a Jesus-community these days to going over a waterfall. That's like falling off a cliff, except you've got water in your face, can't see much, and don't know how far to the bottom. If you somehow survive the fall, you've quickly got to start swimming, or else you drown. And your underwear's soaked.

But . . . and this means everything . . . we are a tree with roots!

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Maybe I'm drawn to trees these days because they are stable. Not rushing. Calm. They seem unaffected by all that's going on. Of course, they are affected. But they don't seem to be.

Stable, not rushing, calm, unaffected. I wish we were that. Many of us thought that's what church was. It was not, but it felt that way. Not anymore.

Trees are helping me ponder what we are all about, what's most important. Because we're not finished yet. God is not finished.

I started a few weeks back, with our leaves and fruit. They represent what we are about for people who are not part of our congregation. We have neighbours. We belong to neighbourhoods. God has put us in and among them to be Jesus' people for them. Jesus is already doing so much in their lives and in those places. He says to us, *“Follow me! Come and see.”*

I talked about sharing in God's Presence in those places, individually, as we're scattered and sent into our day-to-day lives. Also, working together as a congregation in our community, where there is a particular need for God's wholeness, healing, and

justice. Our “anchor cause” I call this, and wonder what ours might be.

From our fruit and leaves, I moved down into our roots. Roots anchor a tree, nourish it, and connect it with other trees in the forest.

If our congregation is like a tree, let's tend to our roots.

### III

Here is to something written for an ordinary congregation like ours. It's part of a letter to an early Christian group in Ephesus. Theirs is a large, spectacular, capital city.<sup>1</sup> They are a small, meagre, unimportant bunch of Jesus' people, a tiny bush on the side of the road as you whiz by.

And — get this! — they are a living sign of Messiah Jesus' victory over evil, sin, and death, all powers that stalk and consume our world. They are an outpost of Jesus' rule over all the cosmos. They are a seed of God's new creation, a new sort of humanity and community, a temple for the Living God, the living body of Messiah Jesus. Yes, them! Tiny bush, side of the road. Yes, us! Swept over a waterfall.

So listen! From Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

*This is why I kneel before the Father. . . . I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that the Messiah will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of the Messiah that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.*

*Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Messiah Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.*

(Adapted from the *Common English Bible*)

Paul's prayer. God's word!

### IV

Paul prays this, trusting that it will be true for them, because he trusts God. Trust that it will be true for us, because of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Gorman, [Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters](#) (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 499f.

This is not so much about each of us individually. This is about the church-congregation, us together, these Jesus-communities we are part of.

Think about it. Take it in.

Us, strengthened to the core of whom we are together, out of the inexhaustible wealth of God splendour.

Us together, powered by the Holy Spirit, the palpable presence of God.<sup>2</sup>

Us together, in-dwelled by Jesus Christ himself. Here! Now!

Think about it. Take it in.

Roots anchor the tree in the ground. We are anchored in the love of Jesus. Us together, grasping and experiencing the full dimensions of his love, and discovering again and again how much more of his love there is than anyone can ever know.

Roots nourish the tree. Together, we draw deeply from the living water, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives for us for life without ceasing.

Roots connect the tree to the forest. We, connected to other trees, are with them deeply connected to God the Trinity, Who is the perfect Community of love. All of us together, connected to God in Whom all things are held, cherished, and delightful. All of us together, connected to God on Whose very begin all of reality rests. God, Who is love, fills all of us together with God's fullness.

Think about it. Take it in.

Us together, firmly planted, rooted and grounded in the love of God.

V

Did I say together? So we come together in weekly worship. Yes, even now. I am always sad that many have not been joining, online or when we've been able to be in person. Some are choosing not to. Some are connecting into other congregations, and I'm glad they are able to. Some simply cannot, and we live in that brokenness.

Yet many of us are, week after week. We're sitting down, signing in, and worshipping. We're tending our roots. I refuse to call this "virtual worship." That implies that this is not real. It's not ideal, but this is very real. We are really worshipping God: begin anchored, nourished, and connected.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, Ephesians (Waterloo ON: Herald, 2002), 159.

Still, we sign off. Or, in better times, leave the building. When we're not together, we still need to nourish our roots in God's love. We need time, each day, in prayer.

I've talked about the Presence Project. It's about us growing more aware, available, and attentive to God's Presence throughout our every-days. Yes, you can still sign up for the course I'll be team-teaching about this. It starts Wednesday evening, all online. Just go to the Project's website.<sup>3</sup>

You can find so many helps for daily prayer. Some are printed. Some are online, even apps for your phone. One I use a lot is called *Pray As You Go*.<sup>4</sup> It's by the Jesuits of Britain, and includes prayer, scripture, and wonderful music. You can use it on your computer, or download it for your Apple or Android device. If you want help finding something for you, just let me know.

## VI

Those leaves and fruit we talked about before, they are our life for the world, our mission with Christ.

Our roots, they are our life with God, our abiding in Christ.

Yes, these are tough times. And, we are a tree of Jesus, a tree with the deepest roots.

We need to be clear-minded, with eyes open, about the challenges we face as congregations, and not just until the pandemic ends. We'll have things to do, and decisions to make. We'll need to learn and understand. We'll need to practice patience, be abundant in forgiveness and reconciliation. We'll need to grieve well, and laugh often.

A big danger, though, is that we will become obsessed with all this. Focused on going over the falls. It's hard not to be.

Instead, let's be obsessed with the love of God. Let's be fundamentalists, where our fundamental is the love of God. Let's be progressives, progressing more and more into the love of God. Let's be evangelicals, who can't stop talking about the love of God. Let's be liberals, bountifully sharing the love of God.

*Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Messiah Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.*

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<sup>3</sup> [www.presenceprojectnetwork.ca](http://www.presenceprojectnetwork.ca)

<sup>4</sup> [pray-as-you-go.org](http://pray-as-you-go.org)