

John 6: 1-15

Ephesians 3: 14-21

I have a confession to make: I love trees. And I think there are others here who love them, too.

As a kid, I was always looking for trees to climb: to build forts in, to perch and spy in, or launch snowballs from. I remember a particular instance after college when I climbed a tall pine tree to see the sunrise hit my favorite mountains, the Grand Tetons. The experience gave new meaning to the phrase, “purple mountain majesty,” although Katherine Bates was inspired by a different set of mountains – Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs – where I spend a summer vacation with my family.

Calvin & Hobbes was my favorite comic strip, not least because they were always romping around the woods, and *The Giving Tree* hands-down my favorite children’s book. The authors of both these works, Bill Watterson and Shel Silverstein, are full of wit and wisdom, and worth a revisit no matter what age you are. And how could I not mention Enya’s album, *In Memory of Trees*, which I would listen to every morning when my dad would take my sister and me to school.

Another confession: Christmas is not my favorite holiday, and at least partly I think it’s because I was never comfortable decorating the corpse of a tree in our living room. There, I said it, and now I’ve ruined Christmas for everyone. Evans McScrooge strikes again.

More recently, I look at trees less for climbing and more at how spaced apart they are... in order to hang my hammock. They provide shade to cool off our bodies, and sustenance for a planet also in desperate need to cool off.

So why am I talking about trees today? While there are no trees in our scripture passage today, there is that beautiful phrase, “being rooted and grounded in love.”

For me, trees have always exemplified what it means to be rooted and grounded in the soil of the earth.

And whenever it comes to the sanctity of soil, I turn to the writer and environmentalist Wendell Berry, who says:

“The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector.”

I am always looking for trees which are well rooted and grounded in the soil, whether to climb to great heights or to cling to a hammock.

Aren't we all searching for a sanctuary of space, a place where we can be rooted and grounded in God's love? Where is this sacred place for you?

The people we encounter today in John's story are searching for something... for someone... the Way, the Truth, the Life. And Jesus welcomes them, inviting them to sit down with him and break bread... and a miracle occurs. Despite so many mouths to feed and the expense of buying all that food, Jesus calls upon a boy and his five loaves and two fish to feed the 5,000. His miraculous work is abundantly accomplished, and all eat until they are satisfied. Then a second miracle occurs: the disciples gather all the remaining.

And here I might say something sacrilegious: Jesus is king whether we worship him or not. God does not need reminding of who God is. Love does not need to be told who or what it is. Jesus offers us a gift – the gift to love – not to make him king, but to love one another. The miracle he provides is that, despite the lack of resources, God abundantly provides... so much so that there is extra.

And what are we to do with the extra? Jesus asks his disciples to *“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”* We never hear what happened to those baskets. I suspect that none of the bread went to waste. Traditionally, the 12 baskets represent the 12 tribes of Israel, that Jesus came not only to feed the 5,000 but also the entire Hebrew people, Samaritans, too.

And then the Apostle Paul goes further, saying Jesus not only feeds his people but EVERYONE. This love knows no bounds, for we are all invited to root and ground ourselves in the soil beneath our feet.

To quote Mumford and Sons:

*Keep the Earth below my feet
For all my sweat, my blood runs weak
Let me learn from where I have been
Keep my eyes to serve and my hands to learn*

The biblical story begins with a tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

It ends with the tree of healing next to the River of Life.

I see the arc of the biblical story – indeed the arc of life – as beginning in desire and a start of quest where there will be conflict, for we don't always get what we want... and this quest finally ends in peace when our never-ending thirst is finally quenched.

The story between these two trees is represented here in our sanctuary. Look at the paraments. The A before me is for Alpha, the beginning. The O over there is Omega, representing the end, the last letter of the Greek alphabet. Unfortunately, we are getting familiar with these Greek letters as more variants arise, with lambda being the most recent.

In-between the Biblical trees, the Alpha and the Omega, we find the Bread of Life – Jesus the Christ.

Christ welcomes us to sit – to be rooted and grounded in God’s love. Not so that we might crown him king, but instead to be nourished and refreshed and to share God’s love with one another.

As some of you know, I used to live on Kauai and try to get back there. Lots of people ask me why – of course it’s the waterfalls and the beaches, the friends I made, and the adventures to be had... but there’s also something else. I feel most connected to the earth there. Most connected to the flow of the universe... the mystery and magic of it all. In other words, I feel rooted and grounded in God’s love.

Where do you go to be rooted and grounded in God’s love?

Perhaps it’s here in worship? Perhaps it’s in fellowship with friends or family?

Perhaps in service to others – a habitat day, a circle’s group, or something else?

Perhaps it’s being out in nature, even an island in the middle of the Pacific?

May you find opportunities here, now, to be rooted and grounded in God’s Love.

Let me close with the poem *Woods* by Wendell Berry and then some words from scripture.

*I part the out thrusting branches and come in beneath
the blessed and the blessing trees.*

Though I am silent there is singing around me.

Though I am dark there is vision around me.

Though I am heavy there is flight around me.

Wherever you find your ground, your sacred soil of sanctuary, may God continue to form you from the very ground in which you came from, with the grace and gratitude granted to you with every breath of the Living Word animating your being.

“Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

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