

Really Ready Roots

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Family Sunday, February 11, 2007

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Has anyone here ever liked to wiggle a loose tooth? As a kid, I sure did. Now, though, the whole tooth hanging by a thread thing kind of grosses me out. I think it's because I know the thread is really a root, and the idea of loose roots makes me uncomfortable. Sure it's natural, but, still, I prefer roots to be solidly in place and holding down the fort. Or the tooth. Or the tree. Or whatever.

God loves roots to be solidly in place too, to be healthy and strong. Especially since you and I are God's most precious roots. Maybe you've never thought of yourself in this way. You don't live beneath soil ... unless, of course, you haven't bathed in several days! And you don't sprout ... actually, I guess we all do sprout in our early years. Quite a few kids I met two and half years ago are beginning to sprout right over me! You aren't a vegetable either ... oh, but you may come across that way when glued to the T.V., the PC, or the game cube.

Anyway, my point is we aren't plants. We are people. But even more than that, we are all God's children. We all began life like seeds needing to be nourished. We here in the church were then watered with the Holy Spirit through our baptisms to guarantee our growth together as a family of faith in Jesus Christ. And that sacred watering continues as we spiritually sprout through our involvement in worship, in Sunday School, in service, in fellowship and in friendship.

How do you know you're really growing? How do you know you are blessed, that you are a healthy, strong root ready to love and serve the Lord? How do you know you aren't ... to use the strong, sort of scary word used in our Bible lesson this morning ... "cursed"? That is, that you *aren't* being given a chance to live, to thrive, to help the family tree of Jesus survive?

In a word, you know because you *trust*. "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord," shouted the prophet Jeremiah. When you trust the Lord, you trust you're blessed. Sounds simple ... but there again, you and I know that having trust is never simple. No sooner do we want it to be simple than we become afraid that it is blind, that we'll be betrayed by it. So it's a good idea this morning for all of us on

this family Sunday here at FPC to consider what this trust in God looks and feels and functions like.

One thing in particular about Presbyterians holds us in common ... we have a thing for acronyms. That is, we like to take big ideas and break them down into one word whose letters represent certain related ideas. For instance, back at my old church, we had a youth fellowship just for grades five and six called "F.R.O.G." – which stood for Fully Rely On God. So I'm hoping by my suggesting an acronym for T.R.U.S.T. you'll be helped to remember what it means to trust God. By the way, it's good to take notes on sermons in church ... so feel free!

Here's what I've come up with ... the first "T" is for "Truthful," the "R" is for "Reliable," the "U" & the "S" are kept together to represent "US" and the last "T" is for "Thankful."

To trust God is to believe God is truthful. It is to trust that God does nothing to deceive you. It is to trust that you can know what God wants, that you can read God's mind and heart. It is to trust that God is an open book. Yes, *that* book. The Bible. It is to trust that the Bible is how we come to know about God. There is a lot to get to know in the Old Testament about God's will and ways. A lot of it, honestly, gets confusing. But it gets confusing because it is not only the word of God, but it's also a record of human history, and wherever there is a record of human history there is bound to be confusion and corruption of the truth.

Even still, take the very first thing we get to know about God in the Bible, which we read in the first chapter of the first book of Genesis. If there is one extremely important thing to trust about God, it's that God was telling the truth after creating everything and then commenting on it all by saying, "It is good." No lie. God created everything ... the universe on down to Adam and Eve and those important fig leaves ... and God truthfully proclaimed that it's all good.

God further told the truth when we humans were warned not to pretend we can be God. I can't think of anything more true, really, than the fact that we've regretted, just as God suggested we would, reaching for the apple, taking a big bite and being suddenly overcome with the sensation that we *aren't* good.

To get us back one hundred percent to believing that we are supposed to be good inside and out, and not rotten to the core, God personally walked and talked to us in the person of Jesus. What Jesus truthful? Heaven's yes! Jesus said that he not only tells the truth, but that he *is* the Truth. So in order for us to build up trust in God's

truthfulness, we've got to let Jesus teach us in word and in example. Study him! Go and do likewise.

When we trust God is truthful, we'll trust God is reliable. There are a lot of feelings that can be called "bad" feelings. None perhaps is worse than feeling like someone is unreliable, that they will ultimately go back on ... betray ... what they say and do. And to hear again and again through the Bible that God loves only to then get the sense that this is not actually a reliable sentiment ... well, how awful. Nobody wants or intends to ever feel that way. When we trust that God is all about Truth though, we'll be able to surely see in all sorts of situations that God's love is reliable.

I'm remembering a time when a close family member of mine had a heart attack. Turned out, it was a mild one. But I sure didn't know that at first and I was deeply frightened that this person was going to die. I was studying for the ministry at the time, and found myself actually getting down on my knees in prayer, asking God to help me and this relative through the ordeal. I didn't ask for a miraculous healing, exactly. I've never been one for vending machine type prayers. But I just wanted to know that God was going to be with us come what may, that God's loving, healing, sustaining presence was reliable. It's the only time I've ever actually prayed on my knees. And I'm telling you, the result I got from that prayer was an immediate sense that a holy hand was resting on my shoulder, encouraging me to stand up and walk and face whatever news was to come. I believed God's word was true, and was blessed to further believe God's word is reliable. God really does care and companion us.

I'm going to skip the "U" and "S" part, the "US" part for a moment, and briefly speak to the last "T" – "Thankful." The more we experience God as truthful and reliable, the more experiences we'll have to be thankful to God about. I'm so thankful to God for reaching out to me and reassuring me that time on my knees, fearing for a loved one's life. I'm so thankful that this is just one example of many, many times of uncertainty when I've felt the presence of the Lord close to me. Being thankful to God and to others we love and rely on is a great way, and, to me, the only way to really live this life.

When we spend a lot of time complaining about what we don't have, or about what hasn't happened to us, then we grow bitter and ungrateful, bent on believing nothing, noone ... not even God ... is working on our behalf. So I suggest you and I need to take account of thankfulness the way we may count spare change from our pockets at the end of each day. It helps us suddenly realize we are richer than we know.

Ok, back to the “U” and the “S” ... the “US” part of trusting in God and being really ready roots of Jesus’ family tree. We most experience the truthfulness of God, the reliability of God and find ourselves thankful for these things by being together in community, as one family in worship and work. Many aspects of our American culture can really preach having a “me, me, me” mentality. But church culture cannot be this way. It’s got to be about “us, us, us” all together. That’s why we are here today. It’s why we have church leaders committed to FPC’s vitality and growth. It’s why we know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It’s all about family, community, being separate individuals yet fully united in faith. More than anything, I hope you’ll look at this TRUST as an acronym and allow that word “US” to jump out at you, to grab you, and pull you even closer toward trusting God is truthful and reliable.

The Prophet Jeremiah, who jumpstarted all my thoughts this morning, proclaimed that those whose trust is the Lord shall be like trees planted by water, sending out roots by the stream. No lack of rain can keep the roots from growing a nice, green healthy, fruit-bearing tree. Trust is the only nourishment needed. That is the rain that nurtures any and all emotional and spiritual droughts and doubts about God’s love. And I’m hoping right now that you are, as I am, feeling drenched! Amen.