

Sermon: Rooted in Love

Scripture: Ephesians 3:16

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

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I hope you don't mind my preaching from outside again, it's just that the themes of last week's service and now again this week are better spoken, I think, outside than in. And today I have my friend the tree accompanying me!

You've probably heard all the buzz about trees lately? A German forester and scientist named Peter Wohlleben wrote a book a few years back called "The Hidden Life of Trees" that has become a best seller and captured the hearts of millions around the globe. His findings challenge our very narrow and human-centric notions of trees as basically organic robots designed to produce oxygen and wood. For any of us that grew up climbing trees and sitting under trees and hanging out up in our tree forts and collecting leaves in the fall and anyone who reads the sacred words of scripture referencing the trees of the forest praising God, what Wohlleben claims resonates in a deep way with the truth we have known all along.

Far far from being organic robots, Wohlleben says, trees learn and count and remember, they nurse their sick neighbors and warn each other of dangers. They exchange news about weather coming, they care for their young. Their remarkable thousands of year-old interactive root system that carries all sorts of information back and forth among them, Wohlleben calls the "wood wide web"! And, of course, we all know that without them we would simply not have oxygenated breathable air, so we in fact owe our very lives to trees. It's not new information and in many ways science is catching up to what ancient and

indigenous peoples have known all along, referring to the trees as grandfather and grandmother, maybe more accurate than our cold technical scientific descriptions of these great presences among us. Trees are communal beings with so much more happening within and around them than we ever could have imagined.

In our sacred scripture, sacred trees, are certainly a part of the drama. They are there in the very beginning – the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden and that infamous tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are there at the climax of our scriptures when Jesus is raised up on the cross beams of a tree. And they are there at the very end in the Book of Revelation when the new heaven and the new earth is revealed with a great river and the Tree of Life and the leaves of that tree it says “are for the healing of nations”. Is that *merely* poetry or is it scientific fact that trees can heal nations? Or maybe it’s that poetry can speak the TRUTH of the matter better than our logical, methodical, seeming objective language can do. But my point is that there is something about trees that are more connected to us and important to us than we would ever know. Last year our own Branda Wilhoite took us outside for meditation and some forest bathing which more and more people are coming to accept as another gift that trees have to offer us. They have a calming and renewing effect on us. Are you stressed right now about the pandemic and your family or the upcoming election? Go and sit by a tree or in a forest and receive the blessing that they offer. God made us interdependent upon one another for us to be blessings to one another. We know the truth of that as children, but we seem too easily to forget it as adults.

But there’s another important place of interdependence that we mustn’t forget and that is human community and specifically our church. Think of worship

whether in the sanctuary or on-line or wherever as church-bathing – that there is something about our being with one another in the context of our sacred scriptures and with a common purpose that is critical to our lives and healing in and of itself.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, the one that some people say is the most beautiful writing in all the scriptures, he affirms and encourages them to receive the blessings of being in Christ with one another. He explains that THEY are called together for the healing of nations, that they are the chosen people of God, not chosen for privilege and special treatment, but chosen to show forth God's love for the world because they've experienced it in the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross and his being raised from the dead and his ongoing presence in the world. He uses a tree metaphor actually to speak of how the community of Christ Jesus receives its existence and sustenance saying that it is rooted in love and built on love. That's the source, sustenance and purpose of the church to then bear the fruit of love to others. What a mighty beautiful thing to be a part of!

Paul says the church is "rooted in love and built on love, and will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and depth until knowing the love of Christ, we shall be filled with the utter fullness of Godself." Just as the tree draws water and sunlight and nutrients into itself to become more fully itself and to give shade and to emit oxygen and to bless the wider community of life, so too does the church draw upon the presence of Christ, the love of God, the energy of the Holy Spirit and converts that into a community of love and the acts love that flow out to others. That's what the church is about, and we need to remember that as a church community and be

very clear about it. Our strength and our salvation lies in our remaining rooted in God's love and enacting God's love out to the world. It's what makes us a church and will sustain us as a church above all else.

As we enter into the stewardship campaign which we do every year at this time and you consider what you will pledge for the year to come, let's be clear together that we aren't sustained by our money, we are sustained by our love. Let's take note that as important and beautiful as our building is, we as a church aren't built on this plot of land, we are built on love. Let's remember that our endowment does not ensure our future, but God ensures our future and our commitment to love is what will ensure our vitality in the years to come. If it all was lost tomorrow, our money and building and endowment, we would still be church, church, rooted in love and built on love. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it has taught us this, that what makes us church is deeper than any of the trappings around us. The root and the foundation and the promise of the future all rests on love.

So I encourage you to hold this in mind as you consider making pledge for the coming year; that the church is the one place in our culture that holds out for the primacy of love and the one place that reminds us of the dominion of God and the one place where we rehearse and proclaim time and again that the future is not dependent upon us and our frail and faltering attempts to make it all better but it's in the hands of loving, gracious and healing God.

Isn't it a privilege to be a part of such a community that holds out for such a vision and calls us forward in those directions, however faltering our steps might be? So here's what I encourage you to do. Go out and find a tree to sit by and under that beautiful presence, aware of the remarkable network of roots beneath

you in the earth consider your own rootedness in the life and work of the church and consider what you might give this year financially to bless the church and her ministries for your own good and for the good of all those the church touches. But also reflect and consider what other ways you can participate in enacting love in and through our church community. Cause we have a very loving community but we can always grow and find new ways to extend that love out to others and we need not merely your money to do that, we need your heart and creativity and your loving spirit even more.

I hope you feel our deep down connection to one another in Christ's Spirit and I hope you have a sense of how blessed we are by being in this together and I hope this great entity known as the church that is rooted in love and built on love can continue to branch out to offer healing to the nations and the fruit of love to all, in Jesus' name, amen!