

Col. 2:6-15

July 25, 2019

“Rooted”

Zion Bethalto

Kale Hanson

Proper 12C

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

Have you ever felt weak? And I don't mean physically weak. Maybe physically weak goes along with it sometimes. I mean have you ever felt like a weak *person*? This happens when we face injustice. It happens when we face betrayal. It happens when we are wronged. And so often it happens when we just can't hide the weakness in front of others. A student wrote that she felt so empty, so overwhelmed that she broke down crying in class, which made her feel that much worse. A worker confided that he was called into his boss's office and fired, and didn't get out of the conversation before he completely broke down. Not hard to feel weak when there are so many things beyond your control. And maybe that's not you. Maybe you haven't broken down in front of your boss or a class or a spouse. Maybe you're the kind of person who is always strong. Who doesn't share that sort of thing with others. Here's the problem: Psychology Today says that acting strong all the time is just another sign of emotional weakness. Now you don't have to tell us, I won't ask you to raise your hand, but I bet if I did as who has ever felt like a weak person, and if we were all strong enough to be honest, I bet every single hand would be up in the air. Because we all live in the same world. And it's not hard to feel weak when there are so many things beyond your control.

Paul's letter to the Colossians is a letter sent to a church at a time of weakness. And there were all kinds of things going on in the life of this church and in the lives of its people that made them feel weak. The church, like much of the early church, faced persecution. And that means individual Christians were often faced with forces that were far beyond their control. Neighbors that might say something. Romans who might see. On top of that, the Christians in the church were faced with people trying to lead them away from Christ. And those people were so good at it that they didn't even know it was happening! Have you been in one of those rooms where somebody starts using words that you don't really understand? And so you just kind of nod because you assume someone's smarter than you? I'm not going to lie, that happens to me all the time. And on top of all that, they had the same basic stuff that you and I face. Maybe not in the same way, but people were cruel in the ancient world, just like they are today. Sickness took the ones they loved, just like it does today. Death broke relationships, just like it does today. Not hard to feel weak when there are so many things beyond your control, right?

When you do, when you feel weak, the next question inevitably is how do I feel strong? The bottom line is you've got to find something to which you can *anchor* yourself. Paul uses a plant metaphor in today's reading, so let's think about plants for a minute. There's a saying that goes something like, "Storms make trees take deeper roots." Have you heard that before? The idea is that as trees are met with adversity, over time they respond by creating mass, by growing, so that their roots grow and anchor them more firmly. They keep themselves from falling.

A couple weeks ago, I went out into the garden in the front yard of our house. The weeds had kind of taken over, and I decided that was the day I was headed out there to clean things up. So I got my old clothes on, went out to the garden, grabbed the first weed and started to pull. Top ripped right off. I didn't pull out a single root. Rats. So I grabbed the next one. Ripped the top right off again. Rats. But the next one, same thing. And the next one and the one after that. I couldn't pull these things up. And the thing was, *it didn't have anything to do with the roots*. You pull up a weed and there's not much

there. The roots aren't long. They're not deep. There aren't even very many of them. It was about the soil. And that's Paul's point. You're only as strong as the thing in which you are rooted.

It happens all the time that trees end up like this **[picture of washed out roots]**. We've got plenty of these around here. Drive up to Grafton. This is what flood waters do. They either wash the roots out or they saturate the soil so much that even a well rooted tree will just fall over. Anything other than Christ that you are anchored in, this will inevitably happen. Either the storm will be so fierce that it rips you right out of the soil or whatever you're anchored in, self or friends or family or whatever, it'll get so saturated by the storms in your life that you'll just fall over. Not hard to feel weak when there are so many things beyond our control, right? And ultimately any other anchor will give way because no other anchor can deal with death. So even if your anchor gets you through all the little deaths in your life, death of your dreams, death of your goals, death of your family, even if your anchor gets you through all those things if you are not rooted in Christ, your final death will uproot you.

Only Jesus, *only* Jesus solves the problem of our final death. Only a Savior who rose so that you could have life even in death. No one and nothing else can keep you standing when your last moment on this earth comes. Those weeds that I pulled up? They were back in about 24 hours because their roots were still in the soil. And if Christ can keep you standing even through *that* death, how much more can he keep you steadfast and strong and solid through all the little deaths too? All the storms that come your way, all the floods that wash away your hopes and your goals and your family and your friends. The pouring sheets of rain that threaten to saturate everything around you and topple your entire life. Even if you feel like every branch you have has been ripped off you will grow back because your roots are still in the soil. You are strong. You are steadfast. You are solid. Because God has planted you in the soil of his son.

Paul's call to us in Colossians 2 is that we would *grow*. Roots grow deeper in the soil because soil means nourishment. So how do we grow? How do we get deeper into the soil? First and most importantly, *we don't*. God grants us faith and God gives the growth. But he's chosen certain means to make us grow, and I'm going to give you three things that he directs us toward through which he will cause us to grow.

1. Be in the Word. The Bible calls God's word "living and active." Right at the beginning of the world, God speaks and things happen. Jesus speaks to his disciples. The disciples and the apostles preach to their fellow Christians. Be in the Word. If you're not taking time to read your Bible every day, you're missing something. I know it's hard to understand sometimes. So pick something easy. Something familiar. Read a couple verses from John before you go into work. Read a psalm before your commute. Sign up for a daily Bible verse. However you do it, be in the Word. Every. Single. Day.

2. Be in prayer. Prayer is the other half of the divine conversation. God speaks to us through the word. We speak to him in our prayers. Our Gospel reading and our Old Testament reading today, they're both about prayer. The Old Testament reading tells us that God listens to prayer. The Gospel reading is Jesus teaching us how to pray. If you're not sure how, I heard a great idea this week. Go through the petitions of the Lord's prayer, stopping at each one to be specific. So it might sound like "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...Lord, help me forgive my brother. I can't believe what he did. I don't know how I could ever forgive him, but I know that you've forgiven me so help me get there." Or maybe, "Give us this day our daily bread...God, give me what I need for today. And help me receive it thankfully. Help me be content with what I have instead of constantly complaining about what I don't." Be in prayer because God *listens* and he wants to hear.

3. Be in church. You know why? There's a lot of reasons, but I'm going to give you two. First, this is where the soil nourishes us most fully. This is where we not only hear the word, but we *literally*

eat the bread of life. This is where God *works* on you. And second, this is where you connect to your Christian community. A couple years back it was discovered that trees communicate through the soil. Apparently trees not only eat of the same soil, but they send messages to one another through the soil about dangers, food sources, and they protect each other. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the community in which we grow. We're grounded together in the same soil and we're the ones Jesus uses to warn fellow Christians of danger, to point each other toward parts of the word that speak to us, and to protect each other from sin and danger. Eating of the same bread. Drinking of the same Word. Growing in the same soil. Living in the same Jesus. Amen.