

**“The Roots of Faith” – Pr Jim Sprengle, July 12, 2020
Ascension Lutheran Church – Portland**

- I. **Matthew 13:1-8; 18-23**
- II. **You all know by now that I’m a fan of Guinness World Records.**
 - a. It’s fascinating how humans can achieve unbelievable things.
 - b. However, nothing beats nature.
 - c. How many of you know what the world’s largest living organism is?
 - i. Some might think it’s one of the redwood trees... but this organism resides in Oregon, in the Malheur National Forest... a honey mushroom that covers about 4 square miles – that’s a big fungus!
 - ii. Before this discovery, the largest known organism was a plant – a stand of aspen trees bordering Utah and Colorado.
 1. This aspen tree stand has about 47,000 trees, which are all clones of the original
 2. The way they grow is to send shoots out below ground and start new trees from their roots
 3. In my hometown, you can tell which aspen stands are the same in the fall when you look up into the hills and see the same shade of yellow or orange in certain sections of trees
 - d. With the right conditions and environment, a plant can take root and do some amazing things:
 - i. I read a story from science writer Hope Jahren where she talks about the roots of a plant as the most essential thing for its survival.
 - ii. She writes, “No risk is more terrifying than that taken by the first root. A lucky root will eventually find water, but its first job is to anchor... Once the first root is extended, the plant will never again enjoy any hope of relocating to a place less cold, less dry, less dangerous. Indeed, it will face frost, drought, and greedy jaws without any possibility of flight.”
 1. A seed taking root has no guarantees about the quality of the soil, but if it takes root it can go down 30, 100, even 125 feet into the ground... and the results are powerful.
 2. Tree roots can “swell and split bedrock, and move gallons of water daily for years, much more efficiently than any pump yet invented by man.”
 3. If the root takes root, then the plant becomes all but indestructible: “Tear apart everything aboveground—everything—and most plants can still grow rebelliously back from just one intact root. More than once. More than twice.”
[Adapted from Hope Jahren, Lab Girl (Kopf, 2016), pages 45-46]

- iii. As I read about the aspen stand in Utah, they think it is dying off and unhealthy because fire normally burns it down occasionally, but now we put fires out.
 - 1. Without the trial of forest fires, it damages its overall health.
 - 2. And yet if a plant has a brand new or shallow root system, fires will destroy it easily... the roots must grow and be established first, then the plant is incredibly resilient.

III. **How's your root system doing?**

- a. Are you resilient in the face of trials?
- b. What feeds and waters you in a spiritual way?
- c. Are you a lone tree without any support around you?
- d. Jesus tells a parable about how people come to faith... how the seed of faith germinates and begins to take root in the heart of people.
 - i. The Word of God takes root in people when they hear it, as Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
 - ii. God's Word is scattered and spread in a random, lavish way – just tossed about no matter where it lands...
 - 1. Sometimes the hardened heart of a person rejects the Word of saving grace – sometimes the devil's lies are too embedded and quickly the seed of faith is plucked up
 - 2. Sometimes troubles come before roots are established and budding faith is scorched
 - 3. Sometimes other things are more important – jobs, family, sports, friends – and faith is overcome
- e. Yes, these examples are to the new believer who hears the Word of God and faith in Christ takes root or not... depending on the soil... the heart on which it lands.
- f. Some of you had this seed planted in you from a very early age – you may not remember a time that Jesus Christ and faith were not a part of your life.
- g. Others came to faith later, and you clearly remember the Word that spoke to you, the experiences that led to a growing life of faith.
- h. Either way, our faith should never be taken for granted... even if it is incredibly resilient.

IV. **The recent events in our country and world are troubling.**

- a. I probably spend too much time reading the news to keep up with the pandemic, the government and politics, and the protests over race issues
- b. If that is our source of daily nourishment, we cannot help but feel bad.
 - i. All over the news we hear people claiming that America is rotten to the core of its founding and must be completely scrapped – the Constitution and all the rights and freedoms we have are just a sham which need to be thrown out...

1. I can't wrap my head around how flying an American flag or being patriotic is somehow wrong – but people are living here who despise and hate this country... hate this system of government with a passion.
 - ii. It's no less shocking to see the politics and struggle with Covid-19
 1. Some people are literally assaulting others – doing physical harm to people as they argue about mask requirements
 2. We don't know enough about this virus to be experts, but it seems that everyone knows or believes they know the answer
 3. In the meantime, people are dying alone in isolation wards, lifelong investments in businesses and millions of jobs are disappearing, and even churches are arguing about what to do
 - iii. And with all that going on, I haven't even brought up the presidential election that is just four short months away.
 - c. If all that is your daily dose of sustenance, it is nothing more than poison.
- V. **How is your root system?** Your faith life? Your connection to the Word?
- a. I have a challenge for you today – for every minute you spend scrolling through Facebook posts, reading the news, watching TV or listening to programs – I challenge you to put that much time into reading the Word.
 - b. Inventory time:
 - i. How many minutes from last Sunday to right now have you spent reading the Word of God?
 - ii. How many minutes of have you spent on other media (social, TV, news, entertainment, etc.)?
 - iii. Gardeners, outside people, workers – you are not off the hook – how much time have you spent in other activities rather than God's Word?
 - c. Our root system of faith is based in God's Word, His grace, and our connection to Him through faith...
- VI. **These trials do not have to poison our faith**... they can strengthen it!
- a. Jesus died in the worst trial of all – He willingly humbled Himself by submitting to torture, abandonment, rejection, betrayal and even death.
 - i. In death, He was planted in the tomb – a dead body that was nothing more than an inanimate object... like a seed.
 - ii. It was God's good and gracious will that Jesus would rise from that grave and become the one source of faith that never stops sustaining and blessing us with forgiveness, life and salvation!
 - b. The blessing of faith is eternity... not simply life in this world... I mean life that never ends... the roots of faith extend into *eternal life*.
 - c. Your faith is solid, it is deeply rooted in the good soil of your heart, mind and soul – which means that your trials and tribulations cannot harm you!
 - d. Sure you might be beat up on the outside, but your roots are still providing you with health and sustenance that cannot come from the world.

- e. And not only that, but as you continue to share the Word with others, consider how the shoots of faith pop up all around you... pretty soon you are part of an aspen stand that becomes a super strong, living organism!
- f. No fire, no wind, no struggle will overcome us and the community of faith we belong to... because we have the roots of faith.
- g. Read the Word, stay in touch with your community of faith, and rejoice in the roots of faith that lead to eternal life... Amen.