



Rooted Together IN CHRIST

40-Day Devotionals

Rooted Together in Christ

Pastor Nick Duerr

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7

In the last couple of years, I have built three different garden beds in my backyard. Before you think this is impressive, they're just squares and even then the craftsmanship leaves something to be desired. But after building the boxes, there's another step to making sure these garden boxes are ready to produce all the hoped for tomatoes, zucchini, peas, carrots, and other garden veggies: filling the boxes. To uneducated me, this seemed like a simple process of adding dirt. I learned how little I knew when Mikaela, my wife, shared with me her plans for cardboard, sticks, leaves, grass clippings, all before getting the soil just right. This summer I helped her mix bags of sand, bags of compost, and dirt from the backyard to make the perfect mix so that her plants could thrive. Because to plants, where their roots are is everything. That is where they get their nutrients, it's what determines how much water they have access to, and it provides stability to them as they try and grow tall.

This year, our theme is "Rooted Together in Christ." And while I have many things I could say about togetherness, today I want to focus on where our roots are: in Christ. Christ is the soil we are planted in. Paul tells us in Colossians 2 that, as plants, we flourish when our roots are planted in soil that is just the perfect mix, namely Jesus. He is the perfect soil for you, giving you the correct nutrients, the correct hydration, the perfect place to grow strong. When you are nurtured in that good soil the effects will be evident in your life. When the world looks at us, it might find fragrant flowers, juicy fruit, or relieving shade. All that is true because our roots are in Christ. We have peace, joy, patience—well all the fruits of the Spirit really! —because we are rooted in Christ.

So as we begin this new theme at Trinity, as we look at what it means to be Rooted Together in Christ, I hope this devotion book is a blessing to you. This is the first of 40 devotions where we will be in God's Word, being fed and watered by Jesus Christ. May He bless you during this season.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for all your gifts to me. Thank you for nurturing me and helping me to grow in my faith. By your Holy Spirit help me to continue to trust in You and share Your love with the people around me. As I begin this devotion, bless me by these words that I may continue to live rooted in You. In Your Name, Amen.

Reflect: What are things you can do to make sure you are rooted in Christ?

Rooted to Live

Pastor Chad Wright

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1-3

If a plant has good soil, moisture, and sunshine, it will flourish. If, however, it is placed on a concrete surface with no water and no sunlight, it will surely wither and die. The Psalmist compares the life of a blessed person by first contrasting how they do not live. Because believers are rooted in God's Word, they do not govern their lives by the sinful values of the world or the secular culture. The Psalmist, one who believed in the promise of the Messiah, knew the danger of that. The three verbs—"walk," "stand," and "sit"—warns Christians against a gradual penetration of ungodly influences into their lives. Today, we could say that if our attitudes are shaped by the values of movies, television, and the secular culture, we will wither and die. The pervasiveness of ungodly attitudes in the world around us—covetousness and materialism, sexual immorality, racism, violence, and war—we must resist those influences.

Instead, our delight is in the Torah – Scripture, the revealed Word of God. We meditate on it throughout our daily lives. We acknowledge the Law of God, especially that we cannot save ourselves from our sinfulness. We weed out the sin in us daily by repentance and having a contrite heart before the LORD. That is what the LORD, the Great I Am, desires for us. He came in the person of the Savior, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. Forgiven and free, we get to be fed by the water of life, the Word of God. The Holy Spirit causes us to grow and prospers us. He helps us love God and love our neighbor. Rooted in Jesus and God's Word, we live!

Prayer: LORD, my Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, I praise You that You have brought me to life. Thank You for giving me Your Word that I may flourish with You. As I look to You and meditate on Your Word, may Your Holy Spirit bring about fruitfulness in my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Reflect: Plants need daily nourishment to live and grow. How are you nourishing your faith daily?

Everywhere I Go

Shawna Spiehs

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:8-9

Have you ever moved? If so, you know how much work goes into moving. Moving is hard! It is especially hard when it is moving about 1,000 miles. In 2019, our family made a move. This wasn't just to a different home, but a completely different life! We left a small town with about 450 people. I taught 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders at a Lutheran school. I lived 5 miles from my parents and the farm that I had grown up on. I lived "in town." I actually lived in the house that my grandparents had built in town and we bought from them! So even though I had left for college and spent several years in Nebraska, God had called me to my childhood hometown. I was getting to raise my children in the special place that held so many memories for me!

We often pray asking God to use us. We pray for clear answers or for Him to give us a sign. When people ask why we moved from Kansas to Michigan, my answer is simple...God. God called. My confirmation verse is Joshua 1:9. Through our move, God reminded me that no matter where I go, He will be with me. So when you are faced with a challenge, remember that God will walk with you through every season of your life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You ask for us to talk to you in prayer and give everything over to you. Help us Lord to listen to hear what You are saying to us. Help us to step out in faith, knowing that You will never leave or forsake us. Amen.

Reflect: How will you use your gifts as you step out in faith?

Rooted Together in Mission

Pastor Justin Krupsky

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' Matthew 28:18–20

Power and purpose.

Every time I read or hear this Scripture, I am reminded of our mission and the fuel we have to accomplish it. I hope you know this: you have a purpose.

What is your purpose? To disciple others by sharing Christ's story with love.

This is your purpose: to intentionally give Jesus to others so that they can become more like Him.

Why? Because Jesus is true life.

I also pray that you know you can do all things through Him who gives you strength. He has given us His authority, and His authority is power.

You will feel powerless, but you are not.

You may feel in over your head, but you are not, because Jesus' authority is with you. His powerful presence is not just with you—it is in you.

Remember His authority. Remember His power.

His Word tells us that the same power that raised Jesus from the grave lives in YOU. Read that again, please, and remember it every time you find yourself in a situation that feels like more than you can handle. It may be more than you can handle, but it is never more than He can handle.

Prayer: Father, thank You for creating us with a purpose. Jesus, thank You for being the way, the truth, and the life. Holy Spirit, thank You for living in me. Help me live through You and for You. Amen.

Reflect: How can you live out your mission where you are in life, and how can you tap into His authority each day?

A City on a Hill

Sheri Daniell

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

It is very important that we know that Jesus saved us from our sin, but it is also important to know that He saved us for a reason. We need to shine His light for the world to see. We need to be “the light of the world.” We need to be that “city on a hill.” Our job is not to keep the Gospel message to ourselves where we might be comfortable, but rather we are to share it with our families, friends, community members, and even our enemies (Jesus loves them, too.)

We must get busy. We have a job to do. Let’s make sure that our lamp shines brightly for the world to see. In our everyday lives make sure that the world sees the love of Jesus through our actions and the words that we speak. Don’t let fear or intimidation get in the way of sharing the greatest news we’ve ever heard. Pray that our Father in heaven will give us the words to speak when the situation arises. Look onward for the mission that God is preparing us to go on.

Is your mission in your home? Maybe it’s your next door neighbor. Does the coworker in the cubicle next to you need to see the love of Jesus in you? How about the cashier who is seeming to have a rough day? People everywhere could benefit from the Light that we have to share.

This little light of mine, why don’t you let it shine?

This little light of mine, why don’t you let it shine?

This little light of mine, why don’t you let it shine?

Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thanks so much for sending your Son, Jesus, The Light of the World, to us. Help us be a city on a hill sharing the love of Jesus with everyone who crosses our path. Please give us the words to speak in confidence about the love that Jesus shared with us when He came down to rescue us from our sins. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Reflect: Who will you let your light shine on today?

Stronger Together

Jolyn Felten

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

I'm sure you've heard this text from Ecclesiastes before - most likely at the last wedding you attended. It's a reminder to the newly married couple to stick together and keep God at the center of their relationship.

However, it's not merely a reminder for husbands and wives. This passage is solid proof that God never intended for us to live our lives in isolation. He placed people in families, beginning with Adam and Eve, knowing that wisdom and faith would be passed down from generation to generation. He grouped people in tribes so that strength would come from community. When Jesus began his mission on Earth, he surrounded himself with disciples and friends - so that he could build them up and teach them, but also knowing that their friendships would sustain each other once he could no longer physically walk with them.

Too often, we may view our faith journey as a personal endeavor. We might be tempted to weather our challenges alone. But read the passage from Ecclesiastes again. This life on Earth will bring plenty of difficult labor, pitfalls and battles.

Your family, friends, neighbors, classmates, colleagues, mentors, every person in your "village" - they are an incredible blessing from the Lord. They can walk alongside you and offer assistance - and you can help and build them up as well. Even just one friend in faith makes all the difference. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus said, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Walk together, rooted in Christ.

Prayer: Lord, I sincerely thank you for the people you have placed in my life. Help me to support them and to accept assistance from them as well. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can walk together with You wherever life takes us, rooted together in Christ and growing in Your Word. Amen.

Reflect: Who has God placed in your life that loves you well and points you to Him? How can you reach out and build up someone else today?

Quietly Waiting

Cyndi Carpenter

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Psalm 62:5–8 (NIV)

Waiting can feel like one of the hardest parts of our faith journey. We pray, we hope, we trust—and yet sometimes God's answer doesn't come when we expect it.

My husband and I longed to have children when we were first married almost 25 years ago, but month after month turned into year after year. Five years passed before we welcomed our first son, Brock. There were moments of sadness and discouragement, and five years felt like an eternity. Yet through it all, I continued to pray and trust that God had not forgotten us. I asked Him to lead us to the right doctors, provide wisdom for each decision, and give me peace while I waited.

Looking back now, I can see God's hand guiding every step. He opened doors to the care we needed, strengthened my faith through the waiting, and reminded me that His timing is always perfect—even when I couldn't understand it. The joy of finally holding Brock in my arms was sweeter because I had experienced God's faithfulness through those long years. Then, in His grace, He blessed us with our second son, Luke, much more easily than we ever expected.

Psalm 62 reminds us to "find rest in God" and to "trust in Him at all times." Waiting doesn't mean God is absent. Often, He is working in ways we cannot yet see. Our responsibility is not to know His timeline but to remain faithful, continue praying, and place our hope in Him.

If you are in a season of waiting today, remember that God hears every prayer and holds every tear. Keep pouring out your heart to Him. His plans are always rooted in His perfect love, and He is worthy of our trust, even when the answer takes longer than we hoped.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for being my rock and my refuge. When waiting feels long and my heart grows weary, help me to rest in You and trust Your perfect timing. Strengthen my faith, give me peace in the unknown, and remind me that You are always working for my good. Help me to wait with hope, knowing You are faithful to every promise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: Is there an area of your life where God is asking you to trust His timing instead of your own? How can you intentionally rest in Him this week while you wait?

Growing Straight

Pastor Nick Duerr

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Every now and then I pull a weed and am baffled by its shape. Somehow the weed that I pulled has this long and twisted stem that—when I’m holding it up—makes no sense to me. But when I think about where I pulled the weed from, its shape will make sense. Maybe it is extra tall because it grew up in rocks, or maybe there’s a long flat portion where it had to grow under the weed cloth to get to sunlight, or maybe it has long and narrow growth because it grew laying in a crack in the cement. Usually these weird shaped weeds have their weird shape because of their environment.

These weird weeds stand in contrast, however, to the sugar snap pea plants we grew in our garden. Unlike the weeds, which I would happily do without, these plants had lots of care and attention. We gave them a nice trellis for them to climb and hold onto. And they were regularly checked so that when they started growing too far away from the trellis we could tie them in place and they would grow the right direction. And when those plants matured they provided so many delicious peas to eat.

In 2 Timothy 3, we see Paul talking about the forces that shape us. Timothy grew up taught by his mother and grandmother to know God’s truths and promises. He knew the Word of God. But Paul tells him that he needs to constantly be in God’s scripture, because that will continue to shape him according to God’s plan. Instead of being a twisted weed, by being connected to God’s Word, Timothy would continue to grow straight and tall, and eventually produce much fruit.

And the same is true of us. God invites us to be in His Word so that we may be taught, reproved, corrected, and trained in righteousness. By His Word He shapes us, keeps us connected to Him, and growing tall. And we too will be able to bear much fruit. God is at work through His scriptures, and He invites you to be in His Word constantly, so that you may be who He has planned for you.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, guide me by your scriptures. Help me to constantly be in your Word so that I may continue to grow in my faith and bear much fruit according to your will. In Your Name, Amen.

Reflect: How is your life shaped by God’s Word?

Rooted Together in the Lord's Supper

Pastor Justin Krupsky

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

It's lunchtime as I write this devotion, and this verse is making me hungry. I love Communion. I love the Lord's Supper for so many reasons as a follower of Jesus.

This verse reminds me that when we receive Communion together, Jesus' presence and His gift of forgiveness draw us not only closer to Him, but also closer to one another.

In Communion, we receive forgiveness, but we also receive the power to forgive one another in the same way He has forgiven us. We come to the table to connect with Him as He connects with us, but His very presence also empowers us to connect with one another—to become one body, one loaf, one family.

Think about the amazing truth of tasty bread; shout-out to Red Lobster and Texas Roadhouse! People are hungry for it. I pray that as we become one body, one loaf, connected to each other through the Holy Sacrament of Communion, the world will see our connection and come to the Table with us to receive Jesus as their Savior.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Communion and for making us into a family. Jesus, thank You for forgiveness and for Your presence in our lives. Holy Spirit, please empower us in such a way that the world's hunger for meaning and love is met through us, Your Church. Amen.

Reflect: What is your part in the body of Christ?

Rooted Together

Pastor Nick Duerr

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35

Growing up my family would go camping in the Giant Sequoias out in California. These trees are massive, being the largest living things on earth. In fact, the largest of these trees, the General Sherman tree, has a footprint that is 1,046 square feet, about half the size of my house if you include all the floors. And while this is the largest of the trees, there are thousands upon thousands of these Giant Sequoias in the Sierra Nevada mountains. It is truly a majestic place to visit. But one of the interesting things about the Giant Sequoias is how shallow their roots are. Most trees and tall plants have a taproot, one root that delves deep into the ground to provide stability to the tree against wind and other forces that would try and knock it down. Yet these biggest of trees do not have a taproot, all of their roots are very shallow. Which leaves the question: how do they stay standing up? What stabilizes these trees so that they can stand tall for thousands of years? The answer is other trees. While the Giant Sequoia's roots are very shallow, they are also very wide, covering an area of up to an acre. These wide systems of roots intertwine with the roots of other Giant Sequoia trees so that when wind or other adversity strikes these trees, they may shake, they may tremble, but they stand firm, supported by one another.

This is what I thought of the first time I heard our theme for this year, "Rooted together in Christ." And this is what Jesus' words in John 13 make me think of. Jesus tells us that we are rooted in Him and His love ("just as I have loved you"). He is the rich soil that nourishes us, keeps us strong and healthy. But His love is not the only blessing he has given to us. He also tells us that he has given us one another to love and support each other. His command is that we love each other, so that when we face adversity, when hardship comes, we would have that network of roots tangled together so that we can support one another. This is the church, God's plan for us that we would not only be nourished and supported by Him, but that He has also given us others to do that for us too.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for all You have done for me. Today I especially thank You for the church, where I can be supported by other Christians in my faith. Help me to show Your love to everyone I meet, that they may know the love You have shown me. Amen.

Reflect: What is one way you can show Christian love to someone today?

The Importance of Scripture

Jessica Spalding

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

God's Word is something that we are called to continue in and not move away from. In this passage, Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of what he has learned from Scripture and encourages him to remain faithful to it. Scripture is not simply a historical text or a collection of good advice from the past. It is the inspired Word of God. As Paul says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." Because Scripture comes from God, we can trust it as His truth and authority. We also need to read Scripture in its proper context, considering what the passage says within the whole of God's Word rather than taking individual verses and making them say something they were never intended to say. As Lutherans, we understand Scripture through the distinction of Law and Gospel, recognizing both our sin and our need for a Savior and the forgiveness and salvation God gives us through Jesus Christ. Ultimately, all of Scripture points us to Christ and His saving work for us.

It can be easy to say that we believe the Bible is important but not actually do anything with what we read. God's Word is meant to have an impact on how we live. There are many ways we can intentionally spend time in Scripture. We can meditate on a verse or passage, memorize Scripture by writing a verse on a Post-it note and putting it somewhere we will see it throughout the day, pray through Scripture, or talk with others about what we are reading. We can also ask questions about a passage and use helpful resources to better understand its historical and cultural context, including researching the meaning of Greek or Hebrew words or listening to trustworthy, scholarly Bible studies and podcasts. Resources such as the Blue Letter Bible can be helpful tools, but they should point us back to Scripture rather than replace it.

When we take time to truly engage with God's Word, we give ourselves opportunities to be taught, corrected, encouraged, and reminded of God's promises. We do not read Scripture simply to gain more knowledge or to try to make ourselves better people. God works through His Word to create and strengthen faith in us and to equip us for every good work. The more we understand and treasure His Word, the more we can live out our faith and faithfully serve others as people who belong to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help me to read it, understand it, and apply it to my life. Strengthen my faith through Your Word and help me to always look to Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: What is one way you can spend more time in God's Word?

Plant the Seed

Andrew Brazeal

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Mark 4:26-29

I moved into a new house last summer. Before we moved in, there had been some renovations and property work done that left us with about an acre of mostly dirt, with just a few patches of grass here and there. My kids loved finding all sorts of "treasures" (aka trash from the fill dirt) and rocks, but I had a very different dream: a grassy backyard where the kids could play sports and run around. So I set out to plant some grass seed.

At first, I just kind of haphazardly threw some seed down in a portion of the yard. But then I started thinking, "There's probably a lot more to it than this." And boy, was there ever. I read article after article about how to properly prepare the dirt, what kinds of soil I should put on top of the fill dirt, what type of grass seed was best for Michigan, what brands were more likely to have weed seeds mixed in, and on and on and on. It was maybe a little overwhelming, but I was determined- I wanted my yard to be perfectly prepared for maximum grass-seed action!

So I spent weeks tilling everything up, filtering out rocks and clay, and saving up for the best topsoil and the right grass seed. And then the weather changed. Church work got busy. And somehow, I never actually got around to planting the seed. When spring finally came, I was left with an empty, now muddy backyard. Except for one place. That little section where I had haphazardly thrown some grass seed.

Sometimes I think I can be the same way when it comes to sharing the Gospel with other people- especially people who don't know or believe in Jesus. I want the landscape to be perfect before I plant the seed. I want to make sure I befriend them the right way. I want to make sure they know I'm not just some weirdo. I want to know enough about their life that I can come up with the perfect example or the perfect Bible verse for whatever they're going through. And all of those things can be good. Investing time and energy into relationships matters. Getting to know people matters. Loving people matters. But sometimes I can spend so much time "preparing the soil" that I never actually get around to planting the seed. And that's where Jesus' words in Mark 4 are so encouraging.

The farmer plants the seed, and then... he waits. He doesn't make the seed grow. The farmer plants, and God does the growing. God makes things grow. Sometimes trusting God means telling someone about His love and what Jesus has done for us even before we feel like the timing is perfect. Even before we feel like we've prepared the soil enough. That doesn't mean relationships don't matter. They absolutely do. But we don't have to have everything figured out before we share Jesus. Because faith and growth isn't ultimately up to us. Our job is to plant the seed. God's job is to make it grow. Don't be so focused on preparing the perfect soil that you forget to plant the seed. Tell someone about Jesus. Share what He has done for you. Let them know how He's changed your life. Trust God with what happens next. All we have to do is plant the seed.

Prayer: God, give us the confidence to share Your love and truth whenever we can. Help us to trust that you are always in control. You make things grow. Help us to plant the seed.

Reflect: Who is someone in your life that God is calling you to share the Gospel with?

Let's Get Growing

Sue Sheldon

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. 2 Peter 3:18

I love plants and flowers. During the spring and summer seasons, our local nursery seems to be my favorite place to hang-out. One of my sons took over watering my plants while we were on vacation. After one day of watering, he said he was overwhelmed. So the next day he started counting and said, " Mom, you have 25 flower pots." Growing plants and flowers always gives me a new appreciation of the joy and necessity of the wonderful process of growth. As Christians we too are like plants. We put down our roots, break forth from the earth, spread out our branches, and burst into blossom. Such a thriving condition, however, isn't always evident in our lives. Often we just hang on and merely exist without steadily moving toward maturity and fruitfulness. At such times pray that Jesus will warm our hearts with his love. Send your roots deep into the word of God by meditating on it day and night. Then we will be like a fruitful tree planted by rivers of living water, and our branches will extend outward to others to witness our faith to them.

Prayer: Lord, quiet my heart. Open my eyes to see the wonder of your truth. As I read your word, slow me down, plant it deep in my heart, and help me stay here with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: When is the best time of day that you can devote to being in God's Word?

Stormy Days

Martha Reinking

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Psalm 46:1-2

As a native of Colorado, I am no stranger to the mountains. They are beautiful and awe inspiring, proof that we serve a creative and powerful God. But, if you have ever hiked in the mountains during the Summer then you know that even the most beautiful mountain day can quickly shift into a scary one when the afternoon storms roll in. One minute you are taking in all the sights, sunshine streaming down on your face, and the next dark clouds are rolling in, bringing with them an ominous warning that a storm is quickly approaching. You know that if you don't find refuge quickly to wait out the storm then you are certainly in some trouble. I have had the misfortune of being stuck in such mountain storms and in those frightening times, how thankful I was to find a sturdy building or shelter that could help me feel calm and safe despite the storm raging on outside it.

Life can be a lot like these unpredictable mountain days. God gives us many sunny moments filled with joy, but inevitably we will also face times that feel more stormy than bright. The loss of a loved one, a job being cut, a diagnosis that steals our health, loneliness or (insert your own trouble here), when the dark storm clouds of life roll in, they can bring with them fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Thankfully though, we aren't stuck weathering the storm alone, our refuge is always close by. In Psalm 46:1-2, the psalmist writes, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea." Even the most treacherous storm is no match for our God who has promised to be our safe refuge, even when the world seems to be crumbling all around. He does not promise to take away all the storms in our lives, but He does promise to step into them with us, providing us with strength and carrying us through even when we feel too weak to push on. In His powerful arms we never need to fear. So, next time you sit safely in the warm refuge of your home watching the lightning strike and the rain pour down outside, be reminded that God is more powerful than any storm you may be facing, great or small, and thank Him for being an ever-present help no matter the circumstance.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for being our refuge when life gets stormy. Give us the strength to weather the storms we are facing and the confidence to trust in You even when life feels uncertain. We love you Lord! Amen.

Reflect: Think of a time when God helped you make it through a difficult time. What are some of the ways He provided for you during that time? How can you use that experience in future storms you may face?

When Grief Comes, Take Heart

Jessica Briggs

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. John 16:33

There are some moments in life when Jesus' words seem to speak directly into what we are experiencing. For me, John 16:33 has quickly become one of those verses, since my mom passed away earlier this year. Losing someone we love can leave us with grief, questions, and a sense of emptiness that is difficult to put into words. Even as Christians, we are not promised a life free from sorrow. Jesus Himself tells us plainly, "In the world you will have tribulation." He does not pretend that suffering is not real, nor does He tell His disciples that following Him will make life easy.

Instead, Jesus gives us something far greater: His peace and His victory. He says, "But take heart; I have overcome the world." These words remind us that our circumstances, as painful as they may be, do not have the final word. Death does not have the final word. Grief does not have the final word. Christ does.

As I have dealt with the loss of my mom, I have been reminded that Christian hope does not mean that we never hurt or never cry. We can grieve deeply because we have loved deeply. But we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Our hope rests not in our ability to understand why tragedy happens, but in the promises of Jesus Christ. He entered this broken world, suffered, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Christ has overcome the world, we can cling to Him even when life feels overwhelming and uncertain. His victory over sin, death, and the grave assures us that suffering is not the end of the story.

Perhaps you are carrying a loss of your own. Maybe your "tribulation" is grief, anxiety, illness, family struggles, loneliness, or simply the weight of circumstances you cannot control. Jesus does not promise that those things will disappear immediately. But He does promise to be with us in the midst of them. "In me you may have peace." Our peace is found not in having all the answers, but in having Christ. When we cannot see the way forward, we can still look to the One who has already overcome.

Today, then, we can hear Jesus' words not merely as encouragement to try harder or be stronger, but as a gracious invitation to trust Him. Take heart. Christ has overcome the world. And because He has overcome, we can face even the hardest days with the assurance that nothing—not suffering, not sorrow, and not even death—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, into our broken world. When we experience grief, sorrow, and uncertainty, remind us of His promise. Give us peace when our hearts are troubled and strength when the weight of life feels too heavy to carry. Help us to trust in Christ's death and resurrection and to hold firmly to the hope You have given us through Him. Comfort all who are grieving, and remind us that Christ has conquered sin and death and that our future rests securely in His hands. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflect: When life feels overwhelming or painful, what would it look like for you to "take heart" in the truth that Jesus Christ has already overcome the world?

One Body, One Purpose

Dawn Harris

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head , into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up.
Ephesians 4:15-16

An adult human body has between 206 and 213 bones, over 600 muscles, and about 360 joints. It is an amazing creation by God. And when one bone, muscle, or joint is not doing its job another one often steps in and will often injure the body, as the body is now not functioning properly. I know as I get older this happens more often than I would like.

This reminds me of the body of Christ. Each member should be doing one job and that is boldly proclaiming Christ. Each member should boldly proclaim the truths of Christ and the truths of the inerrant word of God. This may be done in different ways using our various spiritual gifts, but at the heart of all we do is to tell others about Christ.

When we as believers stray from our job and the truth is not told, this allows an injury to the church to occur. The devil is ready and willing to take over in order to destroy. We need to stand firm in our faith and firm in God's truth so that we can build the church up and proclaim the Glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to be bold to proclaim the truth of God's Word. Help us to not give in to the devil's schemes to dilute the message of Christ. Give us courage, compassion, and conviction to build the body of Christ.

Reflect: Where do you struggle to be bold in your message of God's truth? What can you do to build up the body of Christ and encourage others to stand firm in their faith?

Like Roots Beneath the Soil

Pastor Christian Jones

I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my[a] shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. Hosea 14:5-7

Israel had wandered from the Lord, trusting in idols and its own strength. Yet God called His people to return and promised, “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely” (Hosea 14:4).

The Lord then pictures His people as a tree taking deep root. Notice that God is the One who gives the growth: “I will be like the dew,” and “he shall take root.” This is the gift of grace. We are not rooted in Christ by our own goodness or strength. Christ roots us in Himself through His Gospel, our baptism, and His body and blood, forgiving our sins through His death and giving us new life through His resurrection.

We are rooted together too. God gathers us into His Church, where we hear His Word, receive His gifts, encourage one another, and grow in faith and love.

Like roots beneath the soil, God's work is often hidden from our eyes. Yet His promises remain certain. The Lord is at work.

So remain rooted in Christ. Trust His promises, receive His forgiveness, and remain gathered with His people. The God who promised, “I will love them freely,” continues to sustain His people today.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank You for loving us freely in Christ. Forgive our wandering hearts and root us deeply in Your Word and promises. Keep us united as Your people, nourished by Your gifts, and fruitful in lives of faith and love. When we cannot see Your work, strengthen us to trust Your promises. Keep us rooted together in Christ until the day You bring us into Your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Reflect: What is it like to be rooted in Christ together with the Church?

Stirred Up!

Pastor Nick Duerr

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

Nearly every morning I make a cup of coffee. It's not for me, it's for Mikaela, because the worst time to be trying to make coffee is when you're caffeine deprived. So I've decided to try and make her coffee every morning. Part of the process is mixing some sort of powder into the coffee for some nutritional value (if I were a better husband I would've listened better and could tell you what that is). To do this, though, I can't just use a spoon cause that'll just make lumpy coffee. Instead I use a frother, basically some coils of wire in a circle that spin really fast. Usually, when I start the frother it's going so fast that I get a little puff of power before the coffee dampens the effect. But even so, this frother is spinning the coffee mix at such high speed that it's creating a little whirlpool effect, where you can almost see the bottom cup, and, well I've never splashed over the sides of the cup, but it could be a risk.

When the author of Hebrews talks about us stirring up one another, this is what I think of. Because with Jesus, we have all the right ingredients. You have your coffee for your caffeine, you have your white powder for... beneficial reasons. And it's these ingredients that the author of Hebrews has been talking about. Jesus' sacrifice, his blood poured out on the cross, our redemption, and the good news of the resurrection. We have all that! And somehow we can still be lumps. I've heard it described as keeping a million dollars in a tin can. So the author of Hebrews guides us toward living faithful lives. He encourages us to act like that frother, stirring one another up. And not a gentle stir either, but something violent, moving so fast we could create that whirlpool effect. The way that the author tells us to stir up one another is to meet together. Be in relationships with one another.

That's why our theme this year isn't just "Rooted in Christ." Because God's plan for His church is that we would be together. That we will not only be made better by being in a relationship with Him, but also by being in relationships with one another. Sometimes that means that we are the frother and we are investing in other people, and they are stirred up by us. Sometimes that means we are the coffee and we find ourselves needing those reminders, that encouragement from others. And sometimes my metaphor falls apart and we encourage one just by being together in the promises of God. Because in these promises and in relationships with one another, we are encouraged to be all God has planned for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your gifts. As I live in your promises, help me to live in relationships with others around me. Help me to encourage them in their faith, and help me to be stirred up by them for Your mission. In Your Name, Amen.

Reflect: What is one time you've been encouraged by someone else? What is one way you can encourage someone today?

The Bread of Life

Pastor Christian Jones

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. John 6:35

We all know what it is like to be hungry. Our bodies remind us that we need food to live. But Jesus points us to a deeper hunger, a hunger of the soul that cannot be satisfied by possessions, success, relationships, or anything this world can provide.

Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life." He does not merely offer bread; He offers Himself. Our greatest need is not something Jesus gives us apart from Himself. Our greatest need is Christ Himself.

Sin leaves us spiritually hungry and unable to satisfy our own need for righteousness before God. We may try to fill that hunger with good works, religious activity, or personal accomplishments; but, none of these can give us peace with God. Only Christ can.

Jesus promises, "whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." This is the Gospel. Christ has done what we could never do. He lived the righteous life we have failed to live and went to the cross to bear the punishment our sins deserved. Through faith in Him, we receive forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life as a gift of grace.

This draws us back to being rooted together in Christ. A plant cannot live without its roots. In the same way, Christians cannot live spiritually apart from Jesus. We remain rooted in Him by continually receiving His gifts. There we hear His promises, receive His forgiveness, and are strengthened in faith.

Being rooted in Christ does not mean that life will never be difficult. It means that when the trials come, our life is rooted in Someone who does not change. Christ remains our Bread of Life.

So come to Christ. Hear His Word. Trust His promises. When the world leaves you hungry, remember that Jesus is enough. Be rooted deeply in Him, for He alone satisfies the hunger of the soul.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are the Bread of Life. Forgive my sins and keep me rooted in You. Through Your Word and Sacraments, nourish my faith and strengthen me to trust Your promises. Keep me from seeking life in the things of this world, and remind me each day that You alone are sufficient for my salvation. Amen.

Reflect: What idols in your life should Our Bread of Life replace?

Digging Deeper

Pastor Josh Britton

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

I wasn't always great at paying attention. Whether my parents or my teachers, I would hear them, I just didn't always like or find what they had to say to be important or interesting at the time. Man oh man was it tough to find out the hard way.

I would continue on in my foolish immature ways, only to come to my senses when faced with the bitter reality that I should have listened to their guiding instruction. I should have trusted and had more faith in their love that they were displaying, that their instruction, while hard at times, is good. These people wanted what was best for me so that I might succeed in whatever area they were guiding or mentoring me in. I just struggled to wise up and actually believe that at the moment.

In the same way that life giving wisdom from parents, teachers, and mentors of all kinds is good to listen, trust and have faith in, even more so is God's Word.

It is hard to make it far in life when it comes to your relationship with Jesus if you aren't connected to or able to know Him and what He has spoken if you aren't in the Word daily. God's Word is alive and active. It is life giving. It always accomplishes what God desires and never returns to Him empty.

The more we read and learn about the great love that God has lavished on us through Jesus, the more we learn about ourselves and who we are to our heavenly Father. The more we grow in our relationship with Jesus, the more we are able to better love and serve those around us. Our life has new meaning when we view it through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Connected to the truth of God's Word, we are able to trust more deeply and have faith that God is always going to guide us in this life and illuminate our path so that we can walk more closely with Jesus each passing day. We are all on the same road together, so let's daily stay connected to our Guide so that we can show others the way!

Prayer: Jesus, please give me a new desire and hunger for your Word that I might grow in my faith and trust in You. Please empower me to daily follow and walk with you more closely so that your Word continues to take root and grow inside of me each day, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: Do you have a plan to read God's Word or perhaps don't know where to start? If you want a great resource, please check out the yearly reading plans by visiting 1517.org.

Holding Tight

Pastor Nick Duerr

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:33-39

It's not only when we're crossing the street or walking through a parking lot. Whenever we get to a busy place—church, a store, playground, and such—I will make my kids hold my hand. Depending on if it is really crazy I might even make my second grader hold my hand (he's not yet too cool for that, so I'm enjoying it while it lasts). But I do this because when there's a lot going on, lots of people moving around, and plenty of places to get lost, I want to make sure that my kids stick with me and stay safe.

In our reading for today, Paul is concerned about the same things, but on a slightly larger scale. He talks about tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and the sword. These are all problems that we could face or have faced in our own lives. They are very real, and they are very troubling. He even goes so far as to quote Psalm 44:22 showing that it's not just possible, but as the church, we do face these hardships. These things will overwhelm us, they can try and drag us away from Jesus, and from his love. And as tight as we might try and hold on, we just are not strong enough to cling to Jesus well enough.

When we get somewhere busy and I hold my kids' hands, what I've done since they were little is offered them my index finger to hold onto, then, with the rest of my fingers I will hold their wrist (and when they're really little it's about half their arm too). Sure, they're clinging to me, but that's not what keeps them safe, what keeps them close to me. It is my strength, my guiding hand that keeps them out of harm's way and ensures we will never be separated.

This is true of God's love too. We are certainly not strong enough to cling to Him through challenges. But that's not what keeps us safe. He is holding on to us. In His love, in the promises of forgiveness on the cross and resurrection from the grave, He keeps us safe from every trial the world could throw at us. And nothing is greater than our God, therefore nothing can separate us from His love.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, in times of hardship hold on to me and never let go. Amen.

Reflect: What is a circumstance where you have felt distant from Jesus? Looking back, do you see how He was at work?

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Pastor Josh Britton

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2:8-10

Have you ever stopped and paused to think about some of the best and greatest gifts you have ever been gifted? If you take a minute, I am sure it won't take long for you to realize how blessed you are. I bet there have been some great gifts along the way. What about when you were young and you think back on some of your favorite toys or possessions or maybe your first car or home you bought? Perhaps even your spouse, your kids, family and friends or your health makes the list, but does your faith get included in the list as well?

I might suggest that this amazing gracious gift of faith might be the greatest gift that God has generously poured out on His people through the power of the Holy Spirit because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gift of saving faith that the Holy Spirit started working in us through our baptism is amazing. It is my prayer today that we would begin to see with a fresh view just how truly loved, valued, and remarkable it is that God would call us, love us, grant us faith to trust in and follow Him. He is the best gift giver ever! And not only that, we did nothing to deserve this goodness, this gift of faith, from our gracious heavenly Father, but that has never stopped Him from being good, gracious, merciful, kind, and giving in nature. He is just that good. It doesn't stop there.

If we believe, trust, and know that He is good, gracious, and giving in how He gave us faith and bought and adopted us as His own kids, then we also need to see today with fresh eyes that we are also a gift to those around us. Have you ever thought about that? You are God's workmanship and as some other translations put it, His handiwork, craftsmanship, or creative work. Talk about an intentional gift, a new creation, that God fashioned and formed. You are that gift, created in Christ Jesus for good works, to love and serve others around you. You are the gift that others have been waiting for so that they might be blessed, hear the good gospel news of Jesus, and be pointed back to Christ. Go be the gift God prepared in advance for you to be.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the amazing gracious gift of saving faith that I did nothing to earn, but you generously poured it out on me anyways through the gift of the Holy Spirit at my baptism. Help me to know who I am in You, that I might be a gift and blessing to those around me, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: What is one thing you can do today to be a blessing or gift, to someone else?

More Than Head Knowledge

Karen Delmotte

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19

Many of us spend our lives trying to learn more. We read books, attend classes, search for answers, and gather information. Knowledge is valuable, but Paul reminds us in this passage that there is something even greater than knowledge—the experience of Christ's love. Paul prays that believers would not simply know facts about Jesus. He prays that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith. The word "dwell" suggests making a home. Christ desires more than occasional visits into our lives; He wants to take up permanent residence in every corner of our hearts. Paul also prays that believers would have the power to grasp the vastness of Christ's love. This is not something we can accomplish on our own. Understanding God's love requires the work of the Holy Spirit and the encouragement of fellow believers. Together, we discover more of God's love than we ever could alone. Perhaps the most surprising statement is that we are to "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." At first, that sounds impossible. How can we know something that is beyond knowing? Paul is speaking of a relationship, not merely information. Just as you cannot fully understand a loved one by reading a description of them, you cannot fully understand Christ's love without walking with Him daily. The more time we spend with Christ, the more we experience His patience, grace, forgiveness, and faithfulness. We begin to understand His love not just with our minds, but with our hearts. As that happens, we are transformed and filled with the fullness of God. Today, ask yourself whether your faith has become mostly information or a living relationship with Christ. He invites you to know Him more deeply and experience His love in fresh ways each day.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me more than I can fully comprehend. Help me move beyond simply knowing about You to truly knowing You. Make Your home in my heart and deepen my faith each day. Open my eyes to see more clearly the greatness of Your love and fill me with Your presence. May my life reflect the love and grace You have shown me. Amen.

Reflect: What is one way you have experienced Christ's love personally that taught you more than any sermon, Bible study, or book ever could?

The Greatest Restoration

Michele Grupe

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Isaiah 61:1-4

One of the best parts of traveling is standing in places where history comes alive. Walking the streets of Boston along the Freedom Trail, churches, meeting houses, and centuries-old buildings tell the story of America's founding. The Statue of Liberty summons the hope immigrants must have felt as they caught their first glimpse of a new beginning. Gettysburg's battlefields remind us of the tremendous cost of preserving a nation and the hope of healing after a dark chapter of war. The White House echoes generations of leaders who have carried the weight of history.

Historic places remind us where we've been. They preserve stories worth remembering. Yet as remarkable as these landmarks are, they all have something in common. They have needed constant care, restoration, and rebuilding to stand the test of time.

Isaiah 61 paints an even greater picture of restoration. "They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities." God's greatest restoration project isn't made of bricks and stone. It's people.

Sin leaves lives in ruins. Hearts become broken. Hope crumbles. Relationships fracture. But Jesus came to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom to captives, and restore what sin has damaged. Only God can take lives that seem beyond repair, root us together in Christ, and rebuild us into something beautiful for His glory.

Every historic landmark points us to the past. The Gospel points us to the future. One day Christ will complete His work of restoration, and everything broken by sin will be made new. That is the greatest restoration in history.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for being the God who restores what sin has broken. Continue Your work in our hearts and lives, and help us trust that You are making all things new according to Your perfect plan. Amen.

Reflect: Where have you seen God bring restoration out of brokenness, and where are you still waiting to see Him at work?

Building One Another Up

Janis McGrath

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1
Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)*

One of the greatest gifts we can offer someone doesn't cost money or require extraordinary talent—it is encouragement. In a world where criticism is common and people often carry unseen burdens, a kind word, a listening ear, or a reminder of God's faithfulness can strengthen someone's heart in ways we may never fully realize. Words have the power to heal or to hurt, to strengthen or to discourage. In this verse, Paul reminds believers that encouraging one another is not an occasional act but an essential part of living out our faith. Every day, we have opportunities to speak life into someone else's circumstances.

Paul reminds the believers in Thessalonica to continue encouraging one another. Notice that he doesn't say to encourage only those who are strong or those who have earned it. Encouragement is meant to be a regular part of the Christian life. Every believer has the opportunity to help others grow in faith, hope, and love.

Building others up means speaking words that reflect God's truth instead of tearing people down with negativity or judgment. It means reminding someone of God's promises when they feel discouraged, celebrating their victories, praying with them through their struggles, and pointing them back to Christ. Encouragement goes beyond compliments. It is reminding someone of God's faithfulness when they feel uncertain, offering hope when they are discouraged, and walking alongside them through life's challenges. Sometimes, the smallest act of kindness—a phone call, a handwritten note, or simply listening—can have a lasting impact. We all need encouragement at different seasons of life. The beautiful truth is that God often chooses to bring comfort and strength through His people. When we intentionally encourage others, we become instruments of His grace.

Today, ask the Lord to show you someone who needs to hear a word of hope. A simple text message, phone call, handwritten note, or heartfelt conversation could be exactly what God uses to lift someone's spirit.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the people You have placed in my life. Help me to be an encourager who speaks words that bring hope, strength, and life. Teach me to notice those who are weary and to point them to Your love and faithfulness. May my words and actions reflect the encouragement You have given me through Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: Who in your life could use encouragement today, and how might God be inviting you to build them up through your words or actions?

Making the Effort

Jamie Holbrook

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1-6

Here Paul is urging the Ephesian church (and us) to strive to a pretty high standard of living. “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Sounds all good, Paul, but how can ANYONE be “completely” humble and gentle? How can I bear having to be patient and unified with people when sometimes they are so different (and annoying), and frankly, cause me tension and hard feelings? Sounds like a nice idea, Paul, but let’s be realistic! And yet...there is the instruction looking back at me and with it, the realization that on my own, I literally CAN’T succeed here. Sometimes, if I’m honest, I don’t even WANT to care about being at peace with some people in God’s family. I want to avoid them. Can’t I just ignore difficult people and situations? That’s peaceful, right?

But ignoring and avoiding are just not God’s way. God knows we can’t live in unity with others in our own strength AND He doesn’t give us a free pass on “making every effort” just because something is difficult. Good thing in Ephesians chapter 3, the verses right before these instructions, Paul prays that God, “out of His glorious riches may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith....that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”. And then in chapter 4 verse 3, the answer on how any of this unity business is possible is repeated: “in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” God has given us His Spirit, not to help us avoid each other, but to bring us together as His family. He does this out of love for us. He knows unifying peace is the healthiest way to live in a family.

God not only gives us an important mission, but He’s also given His very self to empower us daily to follow His way of peace. In our humanity alone we do not have what it takes, but through God’s Spirit and the “one hope” we share in Jesus, we actually DO have the power to live peacefully with others. God calls us and empowers us to follow this way of life, but will we answer His call and make every effort?

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for loving me and calling me to this important mission of unity, difficult as it may be. Please remind me daily that You have given me all I need in Jesus and Your Spirit dwelling in me to be successful. Help me to turn from apathy and choose hope; choosing to participate in Your loving ways with my best effort.

Reflect: As a part of God’s family, where might you be choosing to give up or not try, instead of “making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit?”

Rooted to Survive

Pastor Chad Wright

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7

A seed doesn't look like much. I remember planting small seeds and being amazed by what grew. When you plant a seed in the ground is important; timing is important. The type of soil is important. The amount of sunlight the tender shoot will need to grow and the moisture levels of the soil are also important. All this planning is taken into account by a successful grower.

The same is true when it comes to our salvation. God is the grower, we are the vegetation. His timing is perfect. From the sending of Jesus our Savior, to the sending of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in water and Word. He saved us. He showered on us His mercy and warmed us with His grace so that we might be alive and grow branches that bear the fruits of His Spirit. (John 15:2,5) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have made us heirs who lived in the hope of eternal life. No matter how the storms of life blow and the blistering heat of trials beat on us, we will survive until the harvest. We will be gathered. While we wait, we can draw the nourishment we need to survive from God and His Word.

Prayer: Triune God, be Thou our stay; Oh let us perish never! Cleanse us from our sins, we pray, and grant us life forever. Keep us from the evil one; uphold our faith most holy, and let us trust Thee solely with humble hearts and lowly. Let us put God's armor on, with all true Christians running our heav'nly race and shunning the devil's wiles and cunning. Amen, amen! This be done; so sing we, "Alleluia! – Lutheran Service Book #505

Reflect: Titus 3:4-7 is one long sentence in the original language. It contains a beautiful summary of the Christian faith. What other passages do this?

He Isn't Finished Yet

Marisa Haigh

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

A new school year can bring a lot of excitement, but it can also bring a lot of pressure. We want to do our best. We want our classrooms to run smoothly, our lessons to be meaningful, and our students to feel loved and successful. Sometimes, though, we can get caught up in feeling like everything has to be perfect from the very beginning.

Philippians 1:6 reminds us of something important: God is the one doing the work. The good work He began in us—and in the children entrusted to us—is not finished yet.

Our students will have hard days. They will make mistakes, struggle to listen, have big emotions, and sometimes take two steps backward before taking one step forward. And honestly, we will have days like that too. But we don't have to have everything figured out. We don't have to be perfect teachers, perfect coworkers, or perfect examples every day.

God is still working.

When we see a child struggling, may we remember that we are witnessing only one small moment in a much bigger story that God is writing. When we feel discouraged by something in our classroom, may we trust that God is still working behind the scenes. And when we feel like we aren't doing enough, may we remember that God chose us for this work and promises to continue what He has started.

As we begin this school year, let's give ourselves—and our students—grace to grow. Let's celebrate the small victories, be patient through the hard moments, and trust that God is faithfully shaping each child, each family, and each one of us.

He began the good work. He is still doing the work. And He will be faithful to finish it.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for trusting us with the incredible responsibility of caring for and teaching Your children. When we feel overwhelmed or discouraged, remind us that You are still working. Give us patience when the days are difficult, joy when we see growth, and grace for ourselves and our students as we learn and grow together. Help us to trust You with the things we cannot control and to remember that You are faithfully completing the good work You have begun. Amen.

Reflect: Where do you need to remind yourself that God is still working—even when you can't yet see the finished result?

Built to Last

Pastor Josh Britton

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. Matthew 7:24-27

When was the last time you tried building something without reading the directions or perhaps traveling to a new destination without consulting a map or using an app on your phone to guide you? Did the project turn out? Did you arrive at your destination? Is anxiety rising in you right now as you imagine what the outcome would be like if you tried either of these options out? It is one thing to be a thrill seeker and to engage in one of these scenarios for fun if the stakes are low. However, we do this in our lives more than we realize when the stakes have eternal implications and we simply don't listen.

When it comes to our relationship with Christ, we have a tendency to think we know how to best navigate life or how to make good decisions without first knowing the blueprint of how to build and have a solid foundation in Jesus. We often don't read, know, or even listen to the Word of God to know what Christ wants for us. Are you striving to build something good in life or trying to reach new heights, but the ground keeps washing out from beneath your feet and you are left wondering why things aren't going great?

Storms in life are certain. Hardships are common potholes for all of us on the road of life. A life guided by the truth of what Jesus says, that is one that is promised to stand the tests we daily face. My words, even with the best intentions, don't stand the test of time. Jesus' Word's are eternal. When Jesus spoke, the universe came into being. When Jesus said "it is finished" and laid down his life on the cross and rose again three days later, He destroyed the power of sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus is calling us today to not just be hearers of His Word, but also doers of His Word. Saving faith in Jesus is living and active, eager to do what He says. Jesus modeled what He expects of us. If Jesus loved, served, and forgave greatly to model for us what it means to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then perhaps today He is calling us today to join Him in His work and do the same.

Prayer: Jesus, may you increase as I decrease. May people see more of you in and through me in the ways that I seek to faithfully love, serve, and forgive those around me. May you empower me daily through the Holy Spirit to live as you have called me, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: What is one way you can be both a hearer and doer of Jesus' Words today by loving, serving, or forgiving someone around you?

No One Wins Alone

Michele Grupe

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:4-5

My son and I enjoy visiting sports halls of fame. Over the past year we've had the opportunity to visit the Baseball, Basketball, Hockey, Football, and Tennis Halls of Fame. Every one tells the story of greatness.

At first glance, you notice the famous names. But if you spend a little more time exploring, you begin to realize something else. No one reached the Hall of Fame alone.

Behind every great athlete were coaches who taught fundamentals, teammates who made sacrifices, trainers who kept them healthy, families who encouraged them, and countless others whose names may never appear on a plaque. Success was always a team effort.

That reminds me of Paul's words in Romans 12:4-5: "For as in one body we have many members... so we, though many, are one body in Christ."

God never intended His Church to revolve around one person. Some preach. Some teach. Some sing. Some welcome visitors. Some prepare meals. Some quietly pray. Some work behind the scenes making sure everything runs smoothly. Each gift matters because every believer belongs to the same body, rooted together in Christ.

The world often celebrates individual achievement. God's Kingdom celebrates faithful service. Whether our role is visible or unseen, every act of love strengthens the body of Christ.

There may never be a plaque with our name on it, but there is something far greater. We have the privilege of serving alongside one another for the glory of Jesus, the true Champion of our faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving each of us unique gifts to serve Your Church. Help us never compare ourselves to others, but faithfully use the abilities You have given us to strengthen the body of Christ. May everything we do point others to You. Amen.

Reflect: What unique gifts has God given you to strengthen the body of Christ, and how might He be inviting you to use them in new ways?

Easy at First

Bruce Volkert

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:12-17

Perhaps you have experienced reading something rapidly without giving too much thought to the meaning behind the words. Someone could ask you what you just read - what you really read - and you might be stumped. If we read the passage above from the apostle Paul quickly we might not really give thought to how it impacts the way we live our life as a follower of Christ. Go back and read it slowly. Read it outloud. Read it reflecting on your own interactions with others. If possible, read it with someone you know well.

At first glance it seems the advice from Paul is what we should do as a follower of Christ. "I can do that" may be our thought. "No problem." Then, on closer inspection, what is being requested is not so easily accomplished. These are instructions on how we should interact with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we are honest, it can be hard to demonstrate these attributes toward the people we are with every day. This includes those who are most likely the ones to aggravate us. Be compassionate, be kind, humble and meek? And show patience! That can be difficult when we have to bear with others who are so difficult. How can we let peace rule our hearts when we have to bear with those who can be so annoying? And, I have to love others who irritate me? How? I don't think thankfulness will be in my heart when attempting this. On top of that, I am supposed to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? C'mon. Let's be real. I am not in a mood to sing Jesus songs with someone who does things to irritate me. Perhaps the only part of the instruction I like is that I should admonish my brother and sister! Admonishing would feel pretty good at times.

However, we are to admonish each other using wisdom from Jesus. Not our wisdom but His. The wisdom of the world calls us to admonish others and complain. Jesus calls us to forgive. He gave us the example of forgiveness. Every trait in the reading Christ lived out. He has called us to live in love as one body of Christ. Even with that annoying little brother (or sister).

Prayer: Dear Lord, move us to dwell in your word so that you may rule our hearts as we live as the body of Christ. Amen.

Reflect: Which trait from verse 12 can be the hardest to put on when I am annoyed with my sibling, my parents, my children or a friend from school?

Grafted in Righteousness

Loren Sheppard

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, 15 to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Psalm 92:12-15

As trees grow, they stay in one place. Trees do not look for water or sun. They stand still and their roots reach deep into the ground for the water that they need. Our Psalm talks about the Cedars in Lebanon which are known for being the biggest and best. When we trust in God, we are like the strong cedars and palm trees.

Where are you planted? Are you planted in the house of the Lord. Your life is not safe because of what you do. You are safe because of Jesus Christ. Christ died and rose for you. He put your roots down deep into His love and His grace. We have been planted with Jesus through our baptism. Our baptism gives us promise.

When hard times come, a weak plant falls over. But a tree with deep roots stands strong. Because you are rooted in Christ, you do not need to fear. He gives you living water that never runs out. Jesus gives you eternal life that never ends. We all need to spend time in prayer and God's word.

Even as your body grows old or weak, your faith stays fresh. God keeps you full of His Spirit. You show the world that Jesus is good. He is your solid rock. He never fails.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, Thank You for planting me in Your house. Thank You for putting my roots down deep in Your love. When life is hard, help me to hold fast to You and pray. Keep me close to Your word so I can live and bear good fruit for You every day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Reflect: What fruits have you seen produced at Trinity this past year? What fruits have you produced? How can you improve your prayer life to be a prayer warrior for Jesus?

The Place God Has Given You

Chris Winter

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Paul uses the human body to describe the Church, exposing two ways that we often fall short to honor ourselves and other people.

The foot says to the hand, “Because I am not like you, I must not belong.” The eye says to the hand, “I do not need you.” By insecurity or pride, we forget that God is the one that has put the body together, as only He has the wisdom and power to do so.

God places different people into different types of service based on their different gifts. We do not belong to the Church because we are “useful” enough. We belong because Christ has made us his own. In Baptism, He joins us to His body, His Church and gives us His forgiveness and life.

We cannot honestly say that we can succeed on our own or that we have nothing to offer.

Would you call our God a liar by doing so? Then trust His placement of yourself and others around you.

The people we overlook may be the very people God has sent to care for us.

The Church both suffers together and rejoices together.

Our differences are a great strength for accomplishing the gospel mission.

The Church is not held together because everyone is alike.

The Church is held together by Christ and that is the only similarity that is necessary.

Prayer: Jesus, please forgive us when we compare ourselves with others, believe we do not belong, or act as though we are independent. Thank you for making us members of your body and church through Baptism. Help us value the people around us, to use the gifts you have given us in service to others, and to overcome our insecurities, pride, and jealousy. Amen.

Reflect: When have you recently needed someone else’s gifts because you could not do something on your own?

Abiding in Jesus, the True Vine

John Rudnicki Jr.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. John 15: 1

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Have you ever tried to grow a garden or flowers? A seed is planted in the ground and must be nourished to produce a harvest. In Baptism, God planted the seed of faith in us, connecting us, His children, to Christ. Jesus is the true Vine who gives us life, nourishment, forgiveness, and salvation. So why is fruit important? Not because it saves us. Fruit contributes nothing to our salvation and cannot replace Christ's death on the cross for our sins. Our salvation is God's gift, received through faith in Christ alone. But those who remain in Christ will bear fruit. As we remain connected to Jesus by faith, He produces good fruit in our lives that serves our neighbors. Sometimes we get this backward, thinking God accepts us because we produce enough fruit. But a branch separated from the vine can bear nothing. We remain in the Vine by trusting in Christ alone for our salvation. He continues to nourish our Faith through His Word, prayer, the fellowship of His Church, and His Sacraments.

Jesus laid down His life for you and calls you His friend.

Prayer: Jesus, you are the true vine. Produce fruit as we stay connected to you. Bless our hands, Bless our words, and Bless our neighbors. Amen.

Reflect: Are you comforted by your works or by the forgiveness of the cross?

Great is God's faithfulness

Lacey Cichoski

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." Lamentations 3:22-24

Broken and bruised. Scarred and shattered. Questioning and helpless. We're never promised an easy life where everything goes our way. But when things don't go according to our plan or tragedy strikes, we can feel like we are left clinging to nothing. It can feel like God is absent or does not care about our circumstances. So, what do we do? We cry out in frustration, anger, sadness and exhaustion. We shake our fist at the sky and wonder why God has seemingly turned His back on us. We lament, which means "to express sorrow, grief or regret." In the book of Lamentations, we see that, time and time again, the author expressed his sorrow and regret to God. He cries out to God and asks "why," just like we do.

But God is not some far away person uninterested in our suffering. He is not surprised by our doubts or our questions, nor is He surprised by our sorrow. In fact, He welcomes our questions and our frustration because it gives Him an opportunity to bestow upon us His grace and mercy. If we cry out to God, He listens, and He answers. The answer may not come at the time or in the way we want it to, but His ways are higher than ours, and He sees a much bigger picture than we do. It may take patience, and it will certainly take trust, but God wants us to give everything over to Him – including our lamentations – so He can show He is trustworthy. God will bring us through the tough seasons in life, and once He does, we must remember that it was God who carried us, so that we are able to remember His faithfulness and give Him all the glory for it. We can wake up each day with the promise of God's unfailing love and His unending presence. Even in our darkest moments, God has not left us, and He is not done working in us yet.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for always being there for me. Please help me to always remember that no matter what happens in my life You are there to comfort me. Thank you that I can come to You with anything, and You promise to hear me and be there for me. Amen.

Reflect: When have you found yourself in a difficult season in life, and how did God carry you through it? Don't forget His faithfulness, because if and when another difficult season comes, you can rest in the knowledge that He carried you before, and He'll carry you again.

Rooted Together in the Word

Pastor Justin Krupsky

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10–11

His Word, a.k.a. the Bible, is powerful. It is living and active. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. It creates faith, equips us, and corrects us. Not simply because the Bible says these things about itself, but because I experience them day in and day out as I spend time in His Word. I also see you experiencing them as we walk together in His Word.

His Word also connects us not just to Him, but to one another. Hundreds of verses call us to stay connected to each other and show us how to do it. Don't miss this: His Word roots us together.

When people read and study His Word together, what happens? Connection.

When we hear His Word and meditate on His Word, what happens? Connection.

So often, we consider how our relationship with Jesus is doing, but today I hope we will also consider how our relationship with His Word is doing. Yes, Jesus is the Word. I get that, and I know that. And please remember: we don't worship the Bible; we value the Bible because Jesus values the Bible. The Bible teaches us His story and His truth.

Prayer: Father, thank You for the Bible. Thank You, Jesus, for making its truth even clearer through Your life and teachings. Holy Spirit, thank You for breathing Your life into me through Your Word. Help me read and meditate on it even more as I move forward. Continue to connect me not just to You, but also to others as I receive Your Word. Amen.

Reflect: What practical step can you take today to strengthen your relationship with the Bible?

Soar

Peter Kiehl

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:28-31

What amazing imagery we get in these verses from Isaiah. With the opening two questions you can almost hear Isaiah shouting in bewilderment to his readers. Of course we know who God is, but have we internalized and remembered how great He is, or are we still trying to do things our way? Isaiah quickly points out that God is omniscient and omnipotent, He is our creator. He is the one to look to in tough times.

In the middle section of these verses we get a very different view. One of youth and vitality, but a reminder that even with our energy and strength we will need a moment to rest. We have all had a moment where we wish we had the energy we see in little children, but we have also seen the crash when that energy runs out. These verses are set to remind us that when we go through trials and struggles on our own, our efforts against them will eventually succumb.

Isaiah doesn't leave us here with his message though and neither does God. Here is where the third leg of this verse comes. When we stand firm in God and His Word. When we are rooted together in Christ, we don't just gain the strength to go through, we gain the strength to rise above. God doesn't just give us enough to survive, He gives us enough to thrive.

This is Isaiah reminding us that our God is not there just watching. He is with us and sustaining us through His Word, through fellowship, through prayer, and through the Sacraments. We can be assured that when we are firmly rooted in Him, we can soar.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Please help us when we feel weak. Help us to keep our focus on you and stay firmly rooted in your word. Help us to remember that a reliance on ourselves is futile, but a reliance on you can never steer us wrong. Thank you for your blessings and the gifts you bestow on us each and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect: What item, experience, person, etc is wearing you down today?

Wholehearted Devotion

by Sue Sheldon

How can a young person stay on the path to purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Psalm 119:9-16

What does it mean to be wholeheartedly devoted to God? I'm reminded of King Hezekiah who faithfully served the Lord with his whole heart. In 2 Chronicles 29 it says that in the first month of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple and repaired them. The nation had fallen into idolatry, but he reestablished proper worship of God. His devotion to God also extended into his personal life. Our devotion to God is characterized by:

Wholeheartedness - Our number 1 desire is to please the Lord.

Diligence - Immerse yourself in the study of God's word. Then we can determine what is right or wrong in God's eyes. Pray constantly. Dedicate your life to Him.

Perseverance - The Christian life is a marathon not a sprint. The Holy Spirit can give us endurance to overcome the temptations and obstacles.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to keep going when things get hard. When I feel weak and want to quit, fill me with your courage. Help me stand firm, trust your plan, and take one more step forward each day. Amen.

Reflect: In what part of your life could you use the encouragement found in God's word?

Remembered by God

Michele Grupe

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

My dad has dementia. Recently, he moved into a memory care community as the disease slowly took away more of the life we once knew. Dementia has changed so much. Some conversations no longer make sense. Memories come and go. But then something beautiful happens.

I've heard him quietly praying, "Lord, help me. Please, Jesus, I need Your help." I listened as my dad and another resident talked about the wooden cross my son made and about their faith in Christ. God's Word reaches places dementia cannot.

As I read Ephesians 2:19-22, one phrase especially stood out: "You are... members of the household of God." Our place in God's family isn't built on how much we can remember. It isn't earned by our intelligence, our accomplishments, or our ability to explain theology. It rests on Jesus Christ, "the cornerstone."

One day my dad may no longer remember my name. He may not remember where he lived or what he did for a career. Yet I find tremendous comfort knowing that Jesus has never forgotten him.

Christ remembers every prayer my dad has ever prayed. Every hymn he ever sang. Every promise made at his Baptism. Every act of faith throughout his life.

Even as dementia changes his mind, it cannot separate him from the love of Christ. His identity is not found in fading memories but in being a beloved member of God's household. My dad's faith is firmly rooted in Christ.

That gives me hope.

Because one day, when Christ makes all things new, every broken memory will be restored. Until then, the Good Shepherd never loses sight of one of His sheep.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for making us members of Your household. When illness steals memories and words, remind us that nothing can steal our place in Your family. Comfort those living with dementia and those who love them. Help us rest in the promise that You never forget Your children. Amen.

Reflect: How have you experienced God's faithfulness during a season when someone you love (or even your own life) has changed in difficult ways?

A Kingdom Never Shaken

Pastor Christian Jones

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29

Much of life can be shaken. Circumstances change, relationships struggle, health fails, and the things we depend upon can disappear; yet, Hebrews reminds us that Christians have received something that cannot be shaken: the kingdom of God.

Our confidence does not rest in the stability of our circumstances or the strength of our faith. It rests in Christ and His promises. Through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, Jesus has brought us into His everlasting kingdom. We belong to Him, not because we have earned it, but because He has given it to us by grace through faith.

This is what it means to be “Rooted Together in Christ.” Like a tree whose roots anchor it firmly in the ground, Christians are strengthened by being rooted in Christ and gathered together around His Word and Sacraments. We were never meant to live the Christian life alone. The Lord places us among His people so that we might encourage one another, bear one another’s burdens, and remain steadfast in the faith.

Notice Hebrews says, “let us be grateful.” The Christian life begins with receiving, not achieving. We have received a kingdom. It is God’s gift. Therefore, we gather in worship with gratitude, not to earn God’s favor, but because in Christ we already have His favor.

Hebrews also reminds us that “our God is a consuming fire.” God is holy, and our sin deserves His judgment. We cannot approach Him trusting in our own righteousness, but Christ has taken our judgment upon Himself. At the cross, Jesus bore God’s wrath against sin so that those who trust in Him might receive forgiveness and eternal life.

Therefore, when life feels uncertain, cling to Christ. When you are weak, cling to Christ. When the world is shaking, remember that you belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

We are rooted together in Christ because He has first rooted us in His grace. His kingdom cannot be shaken, His promises cannot fail, and His Word endures forever.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for giving us a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Root us deeply in Your Word and strengthen us together as Your people. Forgive our sins, preserve us in the true faith, and keep our eyes fixed upon You, our Savior and King. Amen.

Reflect: What was the last thing you clung onto instead of Christ, and how would Christ have proven more beneficial in that instance?



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