

“Roots & Faith”  
Colossians 1:3-6  
September 12, 2010  
Pastor Tom Williams

As we begin our program year and look ahead to our continued growth in faith, we want to begin by considering the roots of that faith. We look back not simply to those like the writer of Colossians who wrote to a church struggling with how its faith ought be expressed but to those who participated in the founding of this denomination and this congregation.

The writer encourages the growth of faith and its fruit and here the fruit seems to be the living faith of this community at Colossus. Today, we celebrate the fruit which is the continuing life of faith celebrated by this congregation but as we do so we need remember that fruit does not simply appear. It is the result of a historical act. To harvest fruit one need recognize that a seed was planted which took root and from that root grew the plant which bears the fruit.

In our history, our roots are such people as John Calvin and John Witherspoon. John Calvin was a leader of the Protestant reformation and looked to as the founder of Presbyterianism or at least of many of the theological ideas upon which it is founded. John Witherspoon was sent from England to help found the College of New Jersey, now a fairly well known university whose name was changed to Princeton. Witherspoon was active in resisting the efforts of England to rule the colonies and was the only clergy person to sign the Declaration of Independence. Witherspoon is considered one of the founders of Presbyterianism in the United States.

And lastly, these are our roots also. This picture is the first elected session of this congregation. These men and women were elected in 1954 to serve as leaders. I hope you will note that this group includes three women – hardly revolutionary for our day but in 1954 the mark of a very progressive and open congregation. Form these roots, we today have grown to become this congregation whose fruit can be found in creative worship services, stimulating classes and sermons, and mission efforts.

And today we plant more seeds as we share the scriptures with young people.

Roots & Faith  
 Colossians 2:6, 7  
 September 12, 2010  
 Pastor Lin Grace Rohr

Tom and Donna have already introduced our focus for today. It may seem strange to talk about trees, fruits, and roots in a worship service but these concrete images are what Paul used in his word to the Colossians to talk about faith,...and they are still helpful to us. Donna did an overview of trees and roots; Tom talked about the fruit of our faith, and now I want to take a few minutes to look at the particular analogy of roots to help us deepen our understanding of this part of verse 7; "...rooted and built up in him (that is in Christ) and established in the faith, just as you were taught..."

First, we know that there are different kinds of roots, most specifically we know there is the primary root, a secondary root, and then all the auxiliary roots. Paul has named for us the primary root of faith...we are rooted in Christ. Someone has pictured it like this:

Christ, his preaching and teaching; service and sacrifice is the root of our faith. As Christians we look to Christ as our primary "root" of strength and stability and we seek to grow our roots of life and faith in him.



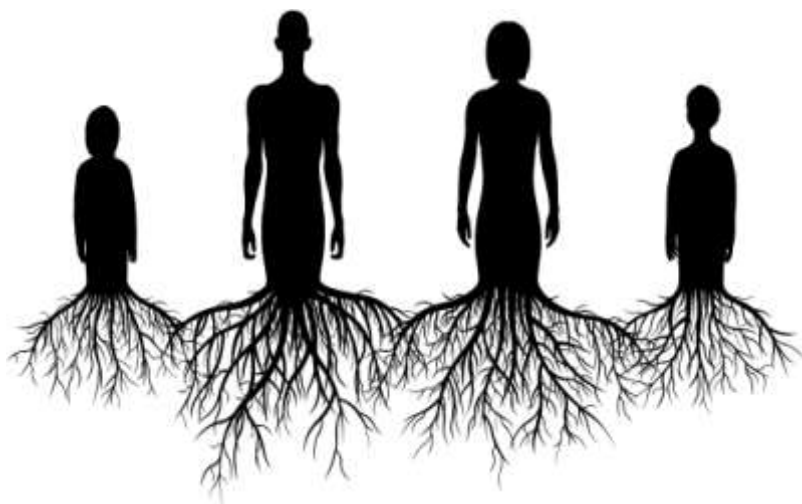
In an actual tree, as well as in our faith, around the primary root are the secondary and auxiliary roots. The faith secondary and auxiliary roots are as complex as an actual root system but before we talk about them let's remember an important point; roots are usually hidden and for good reason! Let's see why, by looking at a picture of the roots of one of these birds of paradise trees that are in the chancel this morning.



We see that it appears to be a tangled mess...large roots and smaller ones intertwined. Viewed apart from the actual tree it looks like chaos not the essential support system to a living thing. It would be the same in our lives. If just the roots of our failures and successes, faults and strengths were exposed, many of our lives would look like a twisted, tangled mess; however these often "hidden" experiences give us our essential life giving support, strength, and nurture to become the men and women we are called to be.

As I said before, the faith secondary and auxiliary "roots" in our lives are as complex as an actual root system. In the physical world a root system has three major functions; 1) anchoring of the plant body to the ground, 2) absorption of water and inorganic nutrients, and 3) storage of food and nutrients for future growth. As we are "established in the faith," to use Paul's language, our faith "root system" has three major functions as well. We already talked about the first one, our primary root, our anchor for and in life, being Christ. The other two are education and experience.

Growing in faith is a lifetime journey. From birth to our death, we are to take advantage of opportunities to be informed in faith. Paul names the importance of this in his words...”just as you were taught.” We are to take advantage of opportunities to be taught, so that no matter what our age, we are putting down the roots of faith for current and future growth.



Here at Covenant we take to heart the promises made in baptism to nurture our children and youth through Christian education. As we kick off another programmatic year today, we renew our commitment. Sunday School for children begins today, youth connection for high school begins tonight, and youth connection for middle schoolers next week. These are just some of the opportunities offered for our children and youth to put down their own faith roots.

But that Baptismal promise is a lifelong, for adults as well; we know that our being “formed in faith” is never “done.” There is always more to learn! So the Session through our adult education committee offers a diverse course of study addressing a myriad of concerns, questions and challenges in living the Christian life. This year the adult education committee has been working diligently to enhance our adult education program. Let me share with you three specific ways you can see what’s new in Covenant’s adult education ministry. These are all available online at our website. I am just going to pull up a page so you know what to look for. First, the calendar...

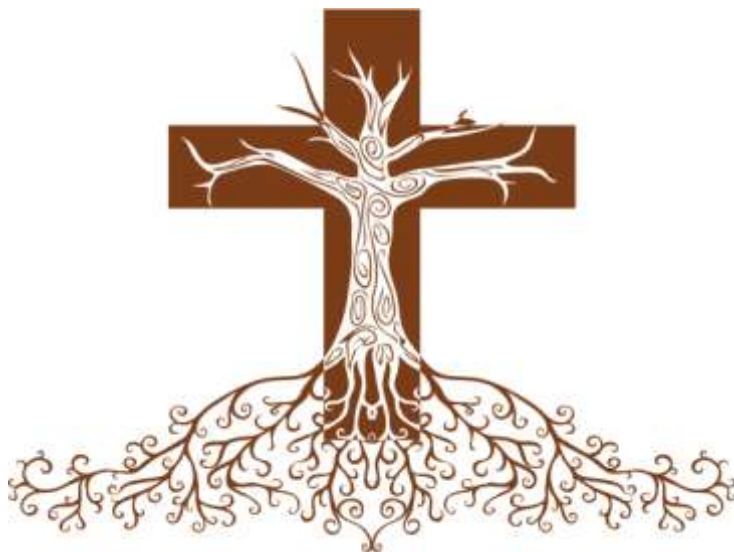


The committee has coordinated the adult education offering calendar in six week increments. The hope is that you can plan ahead to a class that you would like to attend so that your roots of faith can dig deeper in the Christian life. Second,

We have put together a reading list of what the class presenters and your pastors are reading. We know that many of us love to read and are interested in seeing what others are reading. We also know it is encouraging and inspiring to talk with others about what we are reading, we hope that the reading list will be a root going deeper into topics and studies that will enrich our lives individually and as a community. Third,

We also have put together biographies of our class presenters so that you can learn about your teachers and their rootedness in faith. All these are available online and the classes are available at the welcome center.

Here at Covenant we celebrate our blessings of the many opportunities we have at all ages to put down deeper faith roots through ongoing Christian education. Rooted in Christ, we know it is essential to live our faith in informed ways, from Biblical studies, to church history, to current events. We have profound example just this weekend on the anniversary of 9/11 of how crucial that is from the news surrounding a Florida church that wanted to burn the copies of the Quran. Being informed in Biblical studies, we know how peace and justice are proclaimed. Being informed in church history, we remember that the Christian faith had an extreme movement in the Crusades. And being informed in current events, we know the issues and concerns of building a Mosque near Ground Zero in New York City where thousands lost their lives to a violent attack are far from simple. Being informed in our faith, Biblically, historically and in current events through a lifetime of learning is one way that our roots of faith are deepened.



Another way that our roots of faith are deepened highlights the truth and wisdom of these adages; “more is caught than taught.” It’s no wonder why Jesus said, “I will make you fish for people!” Our lives are the hooks! It’s true, people will remember less of what we say and more of how they felt when they were with us...how they experienced us. Are we loving, kind, welcoming, genuine...and not only experiencing us but also our shared experiences of living in faith. Experiences, and what we do with them, in all of life, and in Christian community are the auxiliary roots twisted and intertwined around the primary root of Christ and the secondary root of Christian education.



These trees from our youth group room show over three hundred leaves with the names of teens who have experienced life in our community here. This shows us in a tangible way that all of us, young and old alike, share in the tree of the Christian life. Experiences in worship, service, education, stewardship, prayer, music, fun, games, laughter, tears, getting through the hard times and celebrating the exhilarating times... all deepen our roots in faith and in life, so that individually and together, as we seek to grow in our faith, we witness to our primary root, Christ, the light of our salvation. AMEN

