

Roots

In the past few months I have met people who have come to Canada from a number of places in the world. A man from Pakistan prepared and sold me my lunch. Someone from the Philippines tried to sell me a vehicle. I have been spending some time mudding drywall with a man from Ukraine. I bought some plywood from a man whose roots are in the Netherlands. I enjoy talking with people where they come from, for they often have interesting stories about what brought them to Canada.

Often, when we talk about places of origin, we refer to them as our being the place where we are rooted. In that case, my roots are in the Netherlands, and I could also say that they are in Ontario. Our roots tell us and others where we come from, or so we say.

But, as we know, roots do not actually speak of our origins. A seed may be the origin of a plant, but the roots rarely are. Roots are as much part of the plant as is the stem and the flower and the fruit. For a plant, roots gather nourishment and stability for the plant, but, technically speaking, they do not reveal our origins, even though we use the word in that way.

If we use that definition, I would have to say that my roots are in Alberta. My life is here, and the nourishment and stability for my life are here, not in Ontario or Holland. I am rooted in Alberta, even if I am a transplant. As a transplanted person, my roots may not be firmly rooted in Alberta, but I suspect that will change the longer I am here. In time I might even be considered an Albertan, although considering how it seems that some Albertans are slow to accept people "from away," I might not live long enough for that to happen. (The people of the Maritime provinces are equally slow in their acceptance of "come-from-aways," as they call transplants.)

Instead of using the term "roots" to talk about our origins, it might be more helpful to use the term "origin" for that purpose and instead use the term, "root," to talk about that which gathers nourishment and provides stability. Thinking of things that way helps us understand what Paul means when we ought to be rooted in Christ (Colossians 2:7). Instead of thinking of Jesus Christ as being the one who originates us (although he does that as well), we are encouraged to think of Jesus being the one who provides us with nourishment and stability that we need to live. He is the soil that wraps around our roots and provides us what we need for all of life.

When we think of our roots in that way, we are encouraged to consider what it is that we are rooted in. We are presented with many different options as to where we may want to sink our roots, and we want to look for the best one. As any farmer knows, the soil that surrounds the roots must be fertile, and it must be of the right texture to grasp hold of the roots so that the plant does not fall over. Both of these are essential if a plant is going to grow and thrive and produce a crop.

Poor soil will not produce healthy plants. Most often we think of physical nutrients, things like money and health and housing and clothes, and most of us perceive that we get these through our own efforts, by working hard so that we can have what we need to live. Of course, it is somewhat of an illusion to think

that what we have comes from our own efforts. In reality, if God, through Christ, is the soil in which we are rooted, he is the one who supplies us with health so that we can work, with stores so that we can buy food, and an appropriate supply system so that the shelves of our stores remained stocked. We are beneficiaries of these important things, and we cannot say that we have obtained them ourselves. Christ makes our blessings available to us, and the greatest blessing, of course, is our salvation. If he did not make that available to us, we would remain spiritually dead. God is the source of all that we need for life (nutrients), both physically and spiritually, and we cannot live without him. Jesus Christ is the soil which supplies nutrients both for our physical and spiritual lives.

The soil supplies nutrients for the roots, but it also gives stability to the plant. Anyone who has pulled weeds from their garden in the summer time knows how difficult it is to dislodge the roots. The soil grabs onto the roots and it won't let them go. From time to time, however the soil does not do its job. A tree may appear to be thriving in the soil, but its stability and longevity is nothing but an illusion, for when a high wind blows against it, its roots dislodge and it topples over and dies. We might compare the wind to the trials of life. Unless our roots are held tight by something, there will come a time when we will not be able to withstand the pressure. Some things in life might topple us over: a broken relationship, the diagnosis of cancer, the death of a loved one, and certainly death itself is impossible to withstand. Unless something is holding our roots tightly, we will not survive the storm.

Thus, I am obligated to ask, "Where are my roots?" I am not rooted in Ontario or the Netherlands although I could say that those places are my origins. I should not even be rooted in Alberta as the place which keeps me alive and stable. Only Christ truly supplies what we need for life and he is the one who will sustain us as we face the challenges and trials of life, including the greatest trial, our own deaths. If we are rooted in Christ, we can be sure that he will hold onto us come what may, and he will provide us with the nutrients to remain vibrant and healthy and strong. Being rooted in Christ means that we know who sustains our lives and who provides us the strength to face the winds that are sure to come.

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