

THE FAMILY GARDEN

Roots

John 15:1-11; Hebrews 12:14-15

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-family-garden-roots/>

I'm incurably a farm boy, and I love this green, growing time of year. And I love the agricultural images in the Bible. And during this sermon series, we want to see how some of God's teaching about plants, trees and vineyards apply not only to individuals but also to families. This morning's sermon is about roots. Three things about roots: they anchor the plant or tree; they nourish it; and they are unseen, underground (but no less important). Here is a principle of life: The part of me (or my family) you can see is determined by the part of me you cannot see.

The image of the vine is very significant in Israel's history. In Isaiah 5 and other places, Israel is called God's vine. We are told that above the Temple gate in ancient Jerusalem were engravings of vines and grape clusters. But Isaiah 5 declares that God's people failed. The vine dried up and the vineyard became an overgrown wasteland, full of briars and thistles. With that in mind, Jesus boldly announces, "I am the vine!" He will show us—individuals, families—how to be fruitful. Do you hear scripture calling families to redefine success? Jesus talks about vines that grow too much and become unproductive, running wild with shoots (vv. 2-3). There's something in our American culture which always assumes that more is more, when Jesus teaches that less is more. Our families are so busy, so active. But do busyness and activities make us successful and happy? We are pruned by God's Word and by Jesus' love. Obeying and loving. Taking time to listen to God and to each other.

David Elkind tells the story of overhearing his three-year-old son interacting with three friends at his preschool. The first little boy says, "My daddy is a lawyer and flies to Washington a lot." The next one: "My dad owns a company and has his own airplane." Elkind's son says, "My daddy is here." [*The Hurried Child*]. Success doesn't begin with DOING; it begins with BEING (faithfulness precedes fruitfulness). Obeying and loving (vv. 9-10).

This plant and root imagery can help us define success but can also help the family deal with disappointments and crises. If there is anything families need today, it is to prepare children to deal with heartache and failure. Do they fall apart when things don't go their way? Or do they learn to cope and triumph? You see, deep roots can help a plant or tree thrive even in drought. The roots go down into a secret source, no matter the weather.

In v. 11, Jesus speaks of a joy that is full. Do you remember what is going on in this text? Jesus is giving his farewell speech the night before his crucifixion. Up until this point, Jesus has used the word "joy" only once (3:29), but as he is facing execution, he uses it seven times in chapters 15, 16, and 17—when the crisis is the greatest! How could he do that? Because he was connected to an inexhaustible power source. Families have to learn to tap into God's power in disappointment. And we can't wait until the crisis comes to grow the roots!

Our trials will make us better or they will make us bitter and can actually poison others (our second scripture text, Hebrews 12:14-15).

I once read the honest confession of a greatly respected saint who wrote the following: “Lately I have not been abiding, staying at home in Jesus. My heart keeps running away from its true dwelling place, to explore the strange lands of anger, resentment, lust, fear and anguish. Living in Christ means bringing every part of myself home where it belongs [Henri Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*, p. 165]. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote about being “in Christ.” Christ does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, in our sin and guilt and in our droughts and in our need to define life’s purpose. Abiding. Being in Christ.

Some of us were privileged to meet last Monday with Elisey Pronin, our partner pastor in Ukraine. He gave his conversion testimony. His father and grandfather were Communists and Elisey was growing up, neither he nor any of his family were believers. One day, his mother heard some street preachers, singing and sharing the Gospel. She was converted almost immediately and she in turn reached her whole family. Elisey’s father and grandfather turned from Communism to Christ. And think of all the lives Elisey is touching through his work as pastor and faculty at the seminary! The family tree was changed because the roots were changed. First roots, then the fruits. Abiding in Christ, connected to roots that last.