

“Roots and Shoots”
Daniel 7:15-18; Luke 17:1-6
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, November 3, 2019

There used to be an apple tree in my backyard.

The house in Iowa where I grew up - - had a seedling apple tree.

My father planted it at the bottom of a hill.

Then one winter I went sledding - - on that hill.

I saw the tree in my path but hit it anyway. / It wasn't big enough to stop the sled - - or even slow it down really. / The uprooted tree was just a branch in my hand.

I tried to replant the tree in a snowdrift.

Later that day, dad said to me, “A tree won't grow in a snowdrift.”

Which is how I knew he had found out what happened.

Meanwhile - - in that same backyard is an oak tree.

As far as I know the oak tree is still there. / It was planted about the same time as the apple tree. / The trunk is very straight and tall. / I wouldn't want to hit it on a sled.

And the difference - - between these two trees - - makes me think of the Gospel reading for this morning. / In the gospel of Luke - - the Apostles say “Increase our faith” / When they say this they are asking Jesus - - for two things:

To STAY rooted in their faith.

And to send out new shoots and to grow.

The apostles do NOT want to end up like the apple tree.

Instead they want to grow strong like the Oak.

The difference - - between these two trees is - - that one stayed rooted in the soil and grew - - and the other did not. / In the gospel reading this morning - - Jesus says that just a tiny SEED of faith - - can UPROOT a whole tree.

Jesus says FAITH the size of a Mustard seed - - can uproot a Sycamore tree.

It does NOT take much REAL faith. / But what it takes - - is real faith.

A Sycamore tree has an elaborate system of roots.

And mustard seeds are pretty small.

But - - did you know - - that mustard plants produce a LOT of seeds?

Like 3000-4000 seeds per plant!

Think what all those seeds - - all piled up together would look like!

Faith - - like a mustard seed.

It's not about how much YOU have: It's about how much WE have.

AND - - it's about if we really believe - - that we are God's

It's not about the AMOUNT of faith. / Jesus says it only takes THIS MUCH faith to make a difference [hold up fingers in a PINCH]

The Apostles don't feel adequate - - so they say "increase our faith".

But it seems like what they want is MORE - - of what they already HAVE.

And maybe what they NEED - - is actually - - just a little - - of something ELSE.

Look back in the story a bit to see what I mean...

Jesus has JUST talked to them about forgiveness.

Jesus says - - forgive your brother "seven times DAY!".

That's a LOT of times.

And it takes a certain kind of REAL faith to do it.

But - - what the Apostles need MORE OF - - is not faith - - it's forgiveness!

If you had just a TINY grain of real faith - - you could really forgive.

Is what - - Jesus seems to say.

But the repetition - - over and over - - of life's problems and sin - - is tough.

People keep making mistakes.

And SOME people - - even repent!

And A FEW people - - even forgive!!

But to keep that up - - and really believe - - and really love - - takes FAITH.

It's kind of like a little BOY - - who learned the word "duck".

So - - there was this little boy - - who used to LOVE ducks. / He was fascinated by ducks - - and he would sit and watch them - - and point at them. "Wow - - look".

The ducks would fly overhead - - and the boy would crane his neck and watch.

His dad watched this fascination - - and eventually...

His dad taught the boy the WORD "duck".

But then - - after a while - - he stopped being so fascinated.

Now that he knows the word "duck" he doesn't even look up when they fly by!

He has mastered the duck.

Now it's just another duck.

All ducks are the same.

The psychologist Piaget once said:

"Once a bird gets named "bird" - - it loses its "bird-ness".

Which is kind of like saying - - the repetition in life - - DULLS our senses.

So how do we keep FRESH - - and SHARP - - and real?

Keeping it fresh - - and sharp - - and real - - that's where FAITH comes in.

Don't lose faith - - or you lose a whole lot more.

Like birds - - and trees - - and ducks - - and maybe even people.

Life involves repeating things.

AND life involves doing things NEW and fresh.

Does anyone want to do AWAY with celebrating Christmas - - and Halloween - - and Easter - - and 4th of July - - just because we have done them before?

Think of all the GREAT words with "RE" in them:

NOT just REPEAT - - but...

Renovate - - and rekindle - - and remember - - and repent - -

Restore - - renew - - reform - - rejuvenate - -

Maybe this is our chance - - to RECAPTURE our faith!

If you feel like you need a REDO - - ask yourself this:

What would it be like to - - have the excitement of the first time?

Well - - on this All Saints Day - - we look back at the lives of people.

Today I hold up - - past leaders of Plymouth Church - - especially.

Over the years - - we have done this remembering - - once a year.

Today I'm attempting to RENEW - - as we REDO.

We are remembering again on All Saints Day - - yes.

AND - - we are also - - remembering in a new way - - by featuring leaders.

We have been calling Elders and Deacons for a long time here. / Plymouth Church was chartered as a Presbyterian congregation 60 years ago! / In that time there have been lots of notable leaders.

Some of the people I mention today are still alive, but played a part in the early years at Plymouth in the 1960s. / These will help provide a context for the ones we mention as saints who have died.

In October of 1959, the FIRST Reverend Hutchinson - - and a group of people from the Congregational church in old downtown St. Helens chartered a Presbyterian Congregation. It has been 60 years since that beginning. Now a different Reverend Hutchinson - - ME - - celebrates this anniversary with you.

But I am NO repeat of the first Hutchinson - - just the same name.

Elders and Deacons today have different challenges.

And yet - - we can be inspired - - by the faith of those who were before us.

We are ROOTED in a church that does NEW things.

And we are ROOTED in a church that is really OLD!

Jesus - - was a SHOOT - - from the stump of Jesse - - and King David.

Which is to say - - Jesus followers are rooted in Judaism.

The Old Testament is our history.

But the whole point - - was to send out new SHOOTS.

The whole point was to GROW - - like the Oak tree in my backyard.

So listen to these memories of Plymouth:

Our current Clerk of Session, Helen Purkerson says, "I remember coming to Plymouth in September of 1968. / Most of the church leaders seemed to be men. The women taught Sunday School and worked in the kitchen. / After some investigating I found that there were a FEW women who took leadership roles."

Helen is right - - and she become one of them.

Shirley Eaton became an elder in 1961. / Jean Neukom Anderson in 1964.

Some of these names might not mean much to more recent members. / But to those who have been here a while - - the names - - evoke stories. / So whether they evoke stories for YOU or not - - listen to these names - - because they have laid a foundation for what we do today.

After Shirley and Jean there were more...

Nancy Federici was installed as Elder in 1969.

Ida Lloyd Walrod in 1969.

Gale Clemmer in 1972.

Helen Purkerson in 1976.

Judy Dinsmore in 1977.

Since then 40 more years have gone by - - and here we are.

Helen remembers the contributions of some of those early leaders to the FIRST Habitat for Humanity house that was built in St. Helens. / She wrote:

“Nancy Federici donated two vacant lots for the first two Habitat homes in Columbia County - - which were in St. Helens. / This was in 1999. / Several members were involved in making this a reality: Boyd and Leslie Ruby and Jennifer Anderson. All of whom were then members of Plymouth Church.” /

Ida Mae Larsen and Helen also worked on the project.

The house we began last WEEK - - involves many of those same people!

And - - a whole lot more new people.

Our new project - - will complete the 10th Habitat house in St. Helens.

And THIS is the FIRST time - - for a community faith build.

This is an example of an old thing - - being done in a new way.

On this All Saints Day - - we remember the saints of the church.

Among them is Ida Lloyd Walrod who I already mentioned as one of the first women elders. / Other saints who have died, but who helped shape this congregation as Elders or Deacons include: Elmer Lloyd - - for whom the bell is designated.

And most recently, Harold Scudder. [[Others??]]

In the Old Testament - - Daniel refers to Saints too. / But in a different way.

Daniel had a dream of beasts and monsters. / But in that dream Daniel was reassured - - that the beasts would not inherit the Kingdom - - or determine the fate of the future. / Instead - - it is the Saints - - who God will bless.

So with the Halloween celebration behind us for another year - - remember - - there is NOTHING scary about Saints and Spirits of those past. / What is scary - - is the beastliness of the world. / BUT - - Daniel says - - THAT will be overcome.

Sometimes THAT - - might seem like an impossibility.

DO we really believe - - that God will have the last word? In this crazy world?

Well - - all we need - - according to Luke - - is faith the size of a mustard seed.

God WILL do the rest.

We have inherited this amazing church community! / The world is in need of it!
And the work is never done. / It keeps coming - - year after year.

But with FAITH - - it will not just be a REDO - - it will be a RENEWAL!

How do you think YOU will be remembered? / Who will remember you?

Hopefully - - the SHOOTS - - growing from this amazing family tree of faith.