

“Deeply Rooted”

Time after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

July 11, 2010

Life is a series of rhythms filled with joy/sadness, celebration/grief, and laughter/tears.

When I lived in Kansas we lived through a straight storm. That is a storm with hurricane force winds, winds that exceeded 150 mph. The day after the storm every tree, every building, everything that stood taller than 15 high was affected. Trees were snapped in half, second stories of buildings damaged. There was a path 7 miles wide and 35 miles long of destruction. It looked as if a giant came through with a chain saw and cut down everything 15 feet tall and above.

In the church lot was a beautiful tall 30-foot blue spruce. The wind literally uprooted the tree roots and all. I remember looking at the tree and seeing just how shallow the root system was. I assumed a tree that tall would have had a deep taproot that went quite a ways down into the earth. But it did not. Because of its size couple with a shallow root system, it didn't stand a chance against the high winds.

Appearances are misleading, aren't they? Like the spruce, I have seen people who appear strong. And like that spruce, their roots were shallow. When the winds of conflict raged they had nothing to hold them secure. Rooted in possessions, popularity, or lifestyle their roots were shallow. In times of crisis their roots had nothing to hold on to. Those who appeared strong and secure were toppled by the winds of conflict. Unfortunately we do not remember them for all the good they had done, things accomplished, we in fact remember how they became toppled, roots and all. It is only those who are deeply rooted who can withstand the winds of change, the winds of conflict, or the winds of trial.

For the people of ancient Israel, the winds they had to deal with were the winds of a foreign power living in a foreign land. At this time in their history they had been held in bondage for hundreds of years in Egypt and now had journeyed in the wilderness for 40-years. They are about to enter the promised land and for those living all they have ever known were the winds of captivity, journeying as foreigners in a strange land, and are about to take up residence in their new home. To live among strangers is difficult at best. To have known only foreign soil, foreign customs, they were a people hungry for familiarity. They wanted the winds of adversity to quit blowing. They needed an anchor, something to hold on to, to keep them steadfast when the winds of adversity blew.

I knew a man whose job required him to move every year. He once told me he had an hour to decide if he was going to move due to the demands of the company he worked for. On one hand he was grateful for having gainful employment. But having to move every year had taken its toll on him and his family. It takes deep roots to weather such winds of change.

When life changes, when winds blow violently, when we are driven away from that which is familiar, we soon discover how shallow our roots are when sunk into the ground worldly possessions. Those who had to move didn't talk about the benefits of a new car, or of a lifestyle of attending ball games, eating at nice restaurants and such. These kinds of things make for shallow roots. And when the roots are shallow any wind, any small wind can blow us over and uproot us from all that we seem to treasure.

Israel discovered this truth. It took some time, but they discovered it none-the-less. Israel learned that strength didn't lie in a promised land (any more than in a new car). Their strength also was not in their bloodline or any heritage. These would prove useless in times of trial. Israel learned that her strength was not in some far away place yet to be discovered. Her strength was close, within her heart and upon her lips.

The writer of Deuteronomy was trying to tell the people that deliverance from the wind would come from God. Their strength to endure was God given. God was there and would always be there (something Israel had forgotten). It would be soon discovered that because God was in them and with them they would discover this in their hearts and by acknowledging this (upon their lips) they would discover just how deep their roots did go.

We forget sometimes that there are no schemes that will protect us. There is no human knowledge that will keep us from harm. And there is no quick fix that can have deep enough roots to hold against the winds of life. Only God can provide this (and God does!). In Christ we are deeply rooted!

When the waters of our baptism are poured over our head, when we enter into worship, praying for, sing about, and listening to God's presence in Word and Sacrament our roots go deep. Each time God comes to us through the family of God, acts of prayer, the reading of God's Word God's grip tightens around us, securing us in the soil of His love, protecting us against the winds of change, the storms of conflict, the trials of life.

We are secure, not in our deeds nor our confidence or strength. We are secure in the knowledge that Christ dwells in us and remains in us. We confess and hold on to the truth that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord (not even hurricane force straight winds).

Conflict betrays our human weakness. And our weakness betrays God's strength. And last, God's strength betrays the depth of our roots.

God is an active and living force in our lives. God's presence can handle any winds that may blow our way. But it is in times of crises that we learn just how strong it is. We need not draw it in nor seek it out. We need not seek to secure its presence because it is already present. God's presence is in our heart and we speak of it from our lips.

As we face the winds of conflict and trial may we remember just how deeply rooted we are. May we draw from the great store of strength that already exists. And may we discover yet again that in Christ we are deeply rooted!

AMEN