

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 6, 2017

Text: Romans 9:1-5

Theme: "Good Roots"

If you going to garden you need to have certain things in place. Around here you need security, squirrel security. The squirrels think you are gardening to supplement their nut diet. You could post an armed guard, but actual shooting is frowned upon in the city limits. Nancy and I have resorted to protective custody for six tomato vines. The vines are on the inside the squirrels left to the outside to salivate as they look in. Hopefully this is quite stressful for them.

Of course you need other things for gardening, things like good soil, and adequate water and sunshine. If you have these things plants will sink their roots down into the soil and develop good ones. The roots secure the plants against the wind and of course take in water and nutrients. The sap flow all starts down at the roots.

God is the real Master Gardener. Jesus tells us that He is the vine and His Father is the vinedresser (a word that is more often translated farmer, georgos, gewrgos). The Vine has roots. Paul talks about that today.

Today we are pleased to install Sara Walker as our new Kindergarten teacher. We also recognize our other teachers of CCA. Our school is a part of God's gardening. Roots are so important. Bad roots and then no fruit of bad fruit, just dried up branches. As we look at our text today from Romans 9 we see roots are not the problem. The roots are top notch, God given.

There is quite a change in tone from the end of Romans 8 to the beginning of Romans 9. The end of chapter 8 was such a high point of joy. Remember the "merisms"

from last week? “For I am sure that neither death nor life...nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39). In Romans 8 we saw all creation groaning and our groining to be delivered from the bondage of decay. We saw the present sufferings of this age, no matter how great they may be, are not worthy to be compared to that deliverance. We were assured that the Spirit was interceding for us in groanings too deep for human words and that Christ is right there as the Father’s right hand interceding for us. We were confirmed in the fact that God is indeed for us, that He has us, and always will, even always has had us.

But now Paul’s tone has a big shift, “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying...that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” (9:1-3) Why such anguish for Paul? It was about rejection. He had been rejected but worse, far worse, he mourns for those who had rejected the Gospel, spurned the very Messiah they had been waiting for.

After his initial expression of sorrow, Paul lays out before us Israel’s blessings, divine blessings from God—good roots. Here, let me lay them out before you. First of all there is the adoption. Out of all the nations of the earth God had chosen them to be to Him a holy nation beginning with Abraham. Then there was the glory. We can think of the final glory at the end of this age and the beginning of the next, but there is more to the glory. God had appeared to them in some of His glory. We call these appearances *theophanies*. Abram had the experience of seeing the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch passing before him (Genesis 15:17-21). Of course there is Moses and the burning bush. There was the thunder, the lightening, the fire, the smoke, and the trumpet of God’s appearing on Sinai. There was the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. We see other

appearances of God in various ways to Elijah and Elisha, to Isaiah and to Ezekiel. Paul has more, just getting started. Theirs were the covenants. Yes, we think of Abraham, through Moses at Sinai, to David. Theirs was the giving the law—again we think of Sinai. In that law God showed them how to live as His holy people, a law that would set them off from the other nations in such a way to make them a beacon. Theirs was the worship—the tabernacle and then the temple service. Both were divine service, the way God promised to be among them to forgive them, direct them, and bless them. And finally theirs were the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Yes, look, all from God, good roots—seven. It was a very stable base and then from out of that base, from that very race—the Christ. The roots were setting all this up, leading to, pointing to, finding fulfillment in this Christ. The nations were to be drawn to that Christ, salvation for Jew and Gentile alike. He is the Vine coming from those divine roots. But not so many of his countrymen in Christ, no, they were seeking a different way. It was one that bypassed the Christ.

Paul understand that, had too, he had been in the same spot. Paul says of them a little later, they had zeal, but not according to knowledge, “I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.<sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.” (Romans 10:2-3) Certainly Paul had been in the same place, himself a teacher of the law, a Pharisee, zealous for the tradition of the fathers, one who even persecuted those following Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, he was seeking a righteousness of his own not that from Christ, one that really quite hard to maintain, even impossible.

But we know Saul did not stay there. God had mercy on him, the chief of sinners, and now he knew there was a righteousness not his own, that of Christ, perfect. Not only was this righteousness for Paul, it was for all. Now Paul was the great apostle to the Gentiles. They were coming to faith in great numbers; still, Paul's heart goes out to Israel according to the flesh. They were looking for the Messiah but one who endured the cross, that accursed death, well, that was a stumbling block to them.

Yes, they would bypass this Christ, wait for another and meanwhile do it their own way. In the end their way, that of their works was nothing but rubbish and like something unclean. Their ongoing rejection of Christ if not repented of, would mean their being rejected to damnation at the end. See how Paul's heart goes out to them as he says, "for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." (vs 3) If only he could have, but he knew that was not possible.

So where are we in all this, where are so many in our culture today? There is always the temptation to construct our own righteousness. The devil, the world, and our flesh would have us think that somehow we are up to it. But obvious we aren't. To bypass Christ is always to bypass forgiveness and life. But, our culture is plagued with a different kind of fake righteousness. We are in a epidemic of self-autonomy when it comes to morality. You build on your own base and you need to be ready to exercise a lot of flexibility, flexibility is good, straight and unbending is bad. You have to understand that right and wrong are always in flux and changing for there is no lasting standard when it comes to right or wrong, righteous or unrighteous. If there is a god, well he is so far removed or unknowable to be anything but irrelevant. Desire trumps any talk of design.

How successful will such rooting be? Could be quite successful for a time. Many people can and do plug into such shallow roots, a lot of time and energy involved. But in the end God's assessment proclaimed by Isaiah holds true, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2) Such a way of life is flimsy and failing. Those truly to define and construct their own righteousness will find in the end that God is not satisfied. In the end it yields withering and dying and wrath. Why would we want to sink down roots outside of Christ? Why would we want to plug into Christ here and into something else the rest of the time? If we do that what does it say and show our children?

God tells us through Isaiah, 'Come, buy and eat, the best, and do so without money or price, delight yourselves in rich food, incline your ear and come to me; hear that your soul may live.' Yes, it's without price for it's already been paid for. "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David." (Isaiah 55:3b) The price has been paid in full by the shoot, the branch from the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), the One upon whom is the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. (Isaiah 11:2)

There is something pretty special about this One who comes right up out of those roots, "...the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." Here is the theophany like no other (Romans 9:5). God came in the flesh to deliver us from this body of flesh. Our Lord's was subject to all the temptations we face here in the body, yet He never sinned, not the first time. This is the ultimate Divine service. What Paul could only wish to do, be cursed that others might be blessed, Christ does and He does it for all. He was put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification.

In Christ we do find satisfaction forever and for now. The crowd in our Gospel lesson all eat and are satisfied from a meal that started with just five loaves and two fish. It was a meal that ended with full stomachs and twelve baskets of leftovers. God has found full satisfaction for His perfect standard of righteousness in His Son. Now as we fed on the Bread of Life, our hunger for righteousness is satisfied. Through the Spirit give us in baptism we do cry out, Abba, Father. We are assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We go forth to live satisfying lives. It is satisfying to us, often brings satisfaction to those around us as God uses us to meet their needs. In Christ we do bring forth the fruit that will last, the fruit of compassion, justice, and mercy. Rooted in Christ the message continues to go out from generation to generation. It's always back to God's roots, and we are only connected to those through Christ.

For Jesus' sake. Amen