

## Rooted and Grounded in Love

### Based on Ephesians 3: 14-21

Well, darned if it didn't happen again! The "Ever-Ready Bunny" made another appearance.

Do you remember a couple of weeks ago, Pentecost Sunday when I was talking about the energy and enthusiasm of candidates being interviewed for ministry? I told a story about one who just exuded the Holy Spirit. He was so filled with God's love it just poured out of him, something like what must have happened that Pentecost Sunday hundreds or years ago, when the excitement was so intense that people spoke different languages, and everyone understood exactly what was being said.

Well, it happened again a week ago in Prince George at the Covenanting service which is always held at the end of our Regional Conference meetings. This celebration of ministry service recognizes new ministry personnel being ordained, commissioned, or accepted to the UC from other denominations. These individuals always have incredible stories to tell. But rather than relate one of the stories itself, I want to relate a segue.

One of the ordinands, P, is an individual in my age bracket. He is just coming into ministry at retirement age. That is in itself amazing, but more so is how his Holy Spirit, or perhaps the Spirit of a Community of Faith has affected others.

I sat beside one of P's congregants, an Asian woman who has been in Canada now about 12 years. She was over the moon about P's ordination, but it was easy to see her joy was way deeper than that.

Our Conference theme was "Rooted and Grounded in Love," words you heard Chris share this morning from our Epistle reading. And this individual had been listening. She was like a kid in a candy store, absolutely bursting with gratefulness. And she couldn't contain it. Every fabric of her being was shouting out, "I am so lucky to be here, in this place, with people who love one another and love God." She projected a gleeful presence and in fact she apologized for being so talkative. I told her not to apologize and in fact to keep talking, especially to folks in her community of faith. Sharing God's love, professing our faith experiences and impressions is so important, especially if it comes from a fellow congregant. Better yet if it is a stranger on the street. Someone in paid accountable ministry can share those things, but when they are expressed from the pews, the impact can be transformative. I wish I could remember the woman's name, Lily perhaps. In any case she left me with an incredible sense of hope. Hope for the church and hope for the world.

As you gleaned from Louise and my sharing during "spirit sightings," there were many times throughout our meeting where we were reminded that despite what seems to be constant chaos and negativity around us these days, we are "rooted and grounded in love."

The author of today's Epistle reading was pointing that out to a questioning and struggling church, reminding them that regardless of their frustrations and doubts, God's love for them was boundless. Reading the First Nation's translation really helps me relate to this text.

***The Chosen One will make his home in your heart. I pray that as you trust in him, your roots will go deep into the soil of his great love,<sup>18</sup> and that from these roots you will draw the strength and courage needed to walk this sacred path together with all his holy people.***

***<sup>20</sup> I am praying to the Maker of Life, who, by his great power working in us, can do far more than what we ask for, more than our small minds can imagine.***

Our keynote speaker and presenter throughout the conference, Jeff Chu, spoke to us in depth of this wisdom, how he has seen it and how he has personally experienced it. He started by telling us that **“our ministry will fail unless it is rooted and grounded in love.”** What did he mean by that?

The church, and indeed our lives are messy he said. Amidst nurturing relationships and much joy our days are interspersed with grief, trauma, discomfort, conflict, and doubt. The church we well know can be a place of spiritual nourishment as we find enrichment in belonging, being accepted for who we are, being held in prayer and being loved through God’s ubiquitous holy presence. However, it can also be a place where we don’t accept our differences, pass judgement, and criticize. We don’t always live out our ministry together in ways that are life-giving. We don’t always walk our vision and mission.

Those are times Jeff would say when we don’t remain rooted and grounded in love, rooted and grounded in the Creator, a God who calls us into being the best we can possibly be.

He shared some personal experiences, stories that were heartbreaking. We heard about a gay man and his husband that were shunned by family. We heard that dreams of his ordination, a passionate desire to serve God, the church and its people have been denied, not on the basis of suitability, training, or theology, but simply because of sexual orientation.

Remarkably Jeff is not bitter. Sad and disappointed yes, but not bitter and resentful. How I wondered was that possible?

It is possible because he sees himself as part of a magnificent tapestry of divine potential. He is connected to something much larger than himself that provides healing, comfort, and assurance. Despite setbacks and personal grief, he feels worthy, and blessed, a child of the universe rooted and grounded in God’s love. And remarkably, Jeff exudes the same kind of faith-filled spirit enthusiasm as does the women I met last Sunday morning.

All of that comes from a knowing that he is connected to all of humanity. He is not alone. He is never alone. He is part of a much larger world, often broken, where others like himself find themselves wounded. Through the creator’s love all are held together in solidarity. A metaphor I was particularly fond of was an image of God as a kind of master quilter. In that, spirit shattered dreams, lost hopes, grief and doubt, like pieces of fabric are sewn together in healing love.

That is how Jeff has survived and it is also how he thrives, knowing that he is woven into creation itself. That is what being rooted and grounded in God’s love means to him. Through that web he somehow, miraculously not only survives, but thrives.

That miracle presents itself for all who stay rooted and grounded in love. It is the fabric which holds our ministry together. The woman in the pew next to me last Sunday experienced that grounding, Jeff does too.

Cast your doubts aside, and know that you are unique, gifted, and special. Know that there is always a place for you where your doubts can be heard, and your grief can be healed.

By staying rooted and grounded in God’s love, an incredible life-giving tapestry forms. From Ephesians this morning we heard, ***by his great power working in us, the Maker of Life can do far more than what we ask for, more than our small minds can imagine.*** We can say amen to that!

Thanks for listening this morning.