

Roots

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Matthew 1:1-17 (selected verses)

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**[Shema, (Hebrew: "Hear"), the Jewish confession of faith made up of three texts (Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41), which, forms an integral part of the evening and morning Jewish services. The name derives from the initial word of the verse "Hear, O Israel The Lord our God is one Lord." Deut. 6:4]*

**Attention, people of Abraham and Sarah. God is our God! God is the one source of all. Love God, your God, with your whole heart: love with all that's in you, love with all you've got! Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates. The Message edited Deut. 6:4-9*

Blessed are those who trust in God, whose trust is God. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. Jeremiah 17:7-8

Roots.

Roots of trees.

Family trees – roots and branches

Rooted in love

Roots and reunions.

In 1964 I went to my grandparent's 50th wedding anniversary celebration in Garrison, North Dakota. 16 grandchildren. I come from a large extended family on my mom's side, the Stewarts. Every summer while we were growing up, aunts, uncles and cousins would gather at a lake cabin near Spokane, WA. My family lived in CA. I have wonderful memories of being with my Stewart cousins 2 weeks every summer. Even though we were not together very often, the relationships on our family tree grew deep roots.

Now fast forward. My dad died in 2002 and two aunts and two uncles had passed. Some of my cousins came to my dad's service and said, "We need to all be together again." So the seeds were planted for a Stewart family reunion. My cousins and their families now spread out all over the country – PA, VA, MD, KY, ND, CA, WA. With much planning, we gathered in 2003. That time was at Priest Lake, Idaho. 48 people and at least 7 dogs came together.

The whole group had not gathered since 2003. But last year one of my younger cousins who lives in Livermore and I started talking and dreaming and planning. And last week 35 of us

gathered at Donner Lake ages 2 – 75. Our family tree is all rooted back to my grandparents Dr. Cecil and Sybilla Stewart in Garrison, ND.

Maybe some of you have been to family reunions large and small. Sometimes they are full of joy and laughter. Sometimes there is shock when we realize just who we are related to. Sometimes there is tension. Sometimes there is emotional baggage from the past.

Reunions can be family, friends, colleagues from school, hometowns, special projects. Maybe you were adopted and there are different feelings around family and family trees. There are many kinds of connections and roots. Sometimes it is to a place or community.

Here are a few lessons I learned on my summer vacation and family reunion.

1) We are part of a family, even though we have not met.

It was an amazing feeling to drive up to Donner Lake and gather at the picnic tables for our first group dinner. I saw some familiar faces of my cousins and then moved into open arms of hugs of many people. Spouses and children I had never met. Cousins I had not seen for 20 years or more. We were part of a circle of family. Soon we are talking and laughing and eating together. One thing that helped was nametags. Soon people knew others by name and face.

That is my hope for the church. God is calling First Presbyterian Church to be that kind of welcoming community, a church family where when someone new walks through the door, they feel warmly welcomed and valued. I think we are good at this. Some of you shared this was your experience when you first came. The church is a family, a community of connection and care. We are siblings in Christ. Friends.

These experiences of reunion make me feel more deeply connected to the larger human family. How can we live in ways that build relationships even in contentious times?

2) Family Trees have surprising roots and branches

I learned new pieces of family history. How my grandparents ended up on North Dakota. Details of a trip my mother took to Germany to visit cousins in 1930. Grandfather's brother dentist in Alaska starting around 1915. A few years ago I researched the Cochran's – learned they came from Paisley in Scotland, a place known for weaving fabrics. I have always loved fabric. Maybe it is in my DNA.

Jesus' family tree is surprising. Let's look at the first verses from Matthew's gospel:

The family tree of Jesus Christ. David's son, Abraham's son:

2 Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, Jacob had Judah and his brothers, 3 Judah had Perez and Zerah (the mother was Tamar), Perez had Hezron, Hezron had Aram, 4 Aram had Amminadab, Amminadab had Nahshon, Nahshon had Salmon, 5 Salmon had Boaz (his mother was Rahab), Boaz had Obed (Ruth was the mother), Obed had Jesse, 16 Jacob had Joseph, Mary's husband, the Mary who gave birth to Jesus, the Jesus who was called Christ. 17 There

were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, another fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and yet another fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Christ.

3) In life, in death and life beyond death, God is with us.

There was an awareness that many of those we love have died. And yet as we gathered, the grief was not overwhelming. We knew those we loved were somehow present. We shared some of the challenges that come in seasons of grief and loss. Two of us had children die at birth. One cousin had a son who died of cancer at 8 years old. We did not have to hide our questions, our pain. We talked about ways we experienced divine love and grace.

It was a time that reminded me of this invitation to be authentic. As a church we can bring our pain, our fears, our grief to God and to brothers and sisters in Christ.

4) God provides a feast in the kin-dom. There is abundance.

35 children, teens and adults at this reunion. Feeding this group at a condo for 4 days was no small miracle. It is a blessing that my sister runs the Meals on Wheels program at her church and knows how to plan for a crowd. So we gave her the position of Director of Food Services. Thank God for Costco. With lots of good planning and food prep teams, the meals were amazing. Each dinner was a feast.

God invites us to share the feast of the Kin-dom of God. The abundance that all may have enough to eat. What are the ways our church can answer that call? How can we share the abundance of blessings? We will pray to discern which mission projects we can be part of to bless and be blessed.

5) Put aside differences while being committed to the common good, Beloved Community

As a family we are similar in many ways, but different in others. Republican and Democrat. Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, don't go to church. Some are single, some divorced, some married, some remarried, gay couples, straight couples. Different opinions about the war between Palestinians and Israel, about raising children, about money, about the upcoming election. And yet, there has always been a spirit of respect.

6) Time together was holy time.

One of best things about vacations is not caring what time it is. I didn't wear a watch. Did not matter when we got up or when we went to bed. Did not matter what the date was. Savor every moment. In the Bible there are 2 kinds of time – chronos and kairos.

Chronos is measured time, chronology, time on clock and calendars. In Luke we read, "In the time of King Herod" Jesus was born. It was a specific time in history.

Kairos, holy time, sacred time, God's time. Jesus proclaimed, "The reign of God is at hand." There were many kairos moments at the reunion. Boat ride across the lake at night. Watching toddlers Betty and Iona. I know I have to live by the clock and calendar much of the time, but I feel a new openness to enjoying kairos time, holy time.

7) A feeling of belonging

While we were all together, we had this feeling of belonging to each other, to this larger family tree with roots, to something bigger. All human beings share the longing to feel safe and seen, to matter, to contribute. All people feel pain and joy, welcome new life, and experience aging and death. All people suffer. All people long to belong. But with our limited imaginations and seemingly unlimited susceptibility to fear and insecurity, we mostly can't fathom that the belonging of God includes us all, or that there is no limit on love, no quota on forgiveness, no ranking of human value, no lifetime maximum belonging a person experiences or offers to others before it's all used up.

It was a little easier to feel this up at the lake on vacation. But many of us are a bit worried and raw, a tad edgy and tired. We want to feel hopeful. Maybe we feel a bit more this week.

We, the Church, that is, you and me and all those everywhere following the ways of Jesus, rooted in biblical stories of resurrection, and drawn by the Spirit into the covenant family of God, we are transformed into agents of belonging for the whole world.

When we live in the actual, particular, singular life we've each been given, committed to be in this place with these people, today, no matter what tomorrow brings or the day after that, something happens to us and through us that we can't control. The Spirit makes the imperfect collection of ordinary people a holy dwelling place of the Divine. We become "the container of the uncontainable." Christ is actually here, among and between us, drawing us into the beloved world where Spirit continues to break down all divisions and bring wholeness. (1)

Roots...Rooted & grounded... Belonging to something bigger. Telling stories...Shema....

Redwoods – A couple years ago I preached on lessons from our redwood trees. Their roots are intertwined. They help sustain each tree in the circle.

Closing from Jim Rigby - The more we love nature and humankind the more we feel the wounds around us. It is important for kind people to protect their hearts when they find themselves living in cruel times.

It can be stunning to hear the cruelty and dishonesty that have become common place in our nation. It is important to treat our external conditions like a storm on the ocean and to keep our inner vessel dry of such hatred so that we do not ourselves sink into the storm.

The branches of a tree cannot grow larger or stronger than the roots will support. Even as our "branches" strive sunward toward justice, so must our "roots" be nurtured in the dark rich soil of peace and compassion. ... make time for rest and joy. One can face the perils of our day and still make time for community with other wonderful souls struggling to keep human sanity alive and celebrate the wonder of being alive. Amen. From [PROTECT YOUR HEART](#) by Jim Rigby, FB post 7.26.24

1) Rev. Kara Root, "Belonging in Turbulent Times," 7.21.24 in the here and now blog