



Sunday, June 19, 9:30am

# Roots and Fruits

SUMMER WORSHIP  
Covenant Presbyterian Church

Sermon for Sunday, June 19, 2022  
“Roots and Fruits” | Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Pastor Charlie Berthoud | Luke 8:4-8

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The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA is underway, with three weeks of online and in person meetings.

Yesterday two new co-moderators were elected, and as you can see from your bulletin insert, lots of important issues are on the agenda.

Many years ago, a moderator of the General Assembly named Syngman Rhee emphasized the idea of “roots and fruits” during his tenure, reminding the church that we have to nourish the roots of our faith in order to see the fruits of our faith.

So I am unashamedly borrowing the sermon title from him.

Our gospel reading today is often called the parable of the sower. But sometimes it’s called the parable of the seeds, or the parable of the soils.

As you’ll hear in the parable, good roots lead to good fruits.

Unlike most parables, this one has an “explanation” following the parable, with a straightforward allegorical interpretation, although this section isn’t part of our reading today.

Most scholars think the allegorical interpretation is a later addition to the scriptures, by some early church leaders, who wanted to avoid too many different interpretations.

But Jesus seemed to like to say things that didn't just have one meaning. Jesus asked a lot of questions, and most parables are a bit perplexing.

In general, I think Jesus shared parables to get us pondering things in new ways, just as our new children's curriculum "Godly Play" encourages the kids to wonder and ask questions and to say "I wonder...."

You might be familiar with the classic definition of a parable, given by biblical scholar CH Dodd:

"A parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from everyday life, the meaning of which is sufficiently in doubt to tease the mind into active thought."

In the spirit of letting our minds be "teased into active thought," listen for God's word:

<sup>4</sup>When a large crowd was gathering, as people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he said in a parable: <sup>5</sup>"A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed some fell on a path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock, and as it grew up it withered for lack of moisture. <sup>7</sup>Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>Some fell into good soil, and when it grew it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "If you have ears to hear, then hear!"

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture.

We launched our Summer School initiative this month, encouraging people to find ways to engage with Prayer and Scripture, hoping that God's word and God's love would take deeper root in our lives, that getting a sort of reset with prayer and scripture would allow good things to grow.



I shared five ways that I have engaged with prayer and scripture over the years, with the hope that some examples might help inspire people to find their own ways to engage.

We still have some yellow cards where you can write down your plans for your own Summer School, your own ways of engaging with prayer and scripture.

For scripture, I'm reading the book of Colossians and pondering the weekly memory verses. The seed imagery led me to Colossians 2, our verse for this week: I love the imagery of being rooted and built up.

Say it with me:

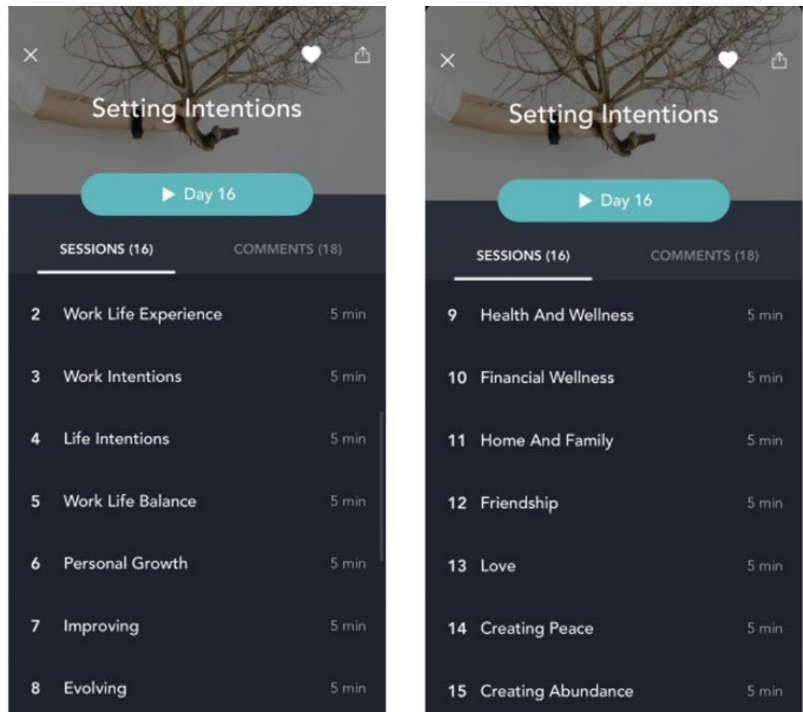


As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6-7

Another part of my Sunday School plan has been almost-daily meditation with the Simple Habit app.

This app has dozens of meditations on various themes.



For the past couple weeks, I've been doing a daily reflection on setting intentions.

Each day, I spent a few minutes thinking about things like work, health, finances, family. At the beginning of every session, the facilitator wisely tells me and other listeners to plant our feet flat on the floor and to imagine roots growing from us into the ground, giving a wonderful sense of being stable and strong.

Then at the conclusion of each meditation, she has us state our intention positively. Instead of "I will not eat junk food" we say "I will seek healthy food."

Or instead of "I will not waste money on foolish things" we say "I will be thoughtful about how I spend money."

That's a great approach for our Summer School initiative, for each of us to state in the affirmative what we will do.

I invite you to plant your feet flat on the floor and imagine roots growing down into the ground. Imagine yourself being rooted more deeply in God's word and God's love.

Then, think of your intention. Maybe something like:

- "I will spend a few minutes each day in silence."
- "I will reflect on the memory verse throughout the week."
- "I will go to a prayer group or Bible study."
- "I will intentionally listen for God each day"

So my Summer School started out well, but this week I realized something wasn't quite right.

With the hope of growing in prayer, I turned again to John Baillie's delightful book, *A Diary of Private Prayer*. For about 25 years, this book has been a spiritual lifeline for me, with a morning and evening prayer for each day of the month. I use it about two or three months per year, and I decided June would be a good month for it. But for some reason, the prayers in this book just doesn't seem to be helping me connect with God right now.

I used to feel refreshed and challenged and nourished by these prayers, but this month, my eyes skim over the page, and things just aren't connecting the way they used to.

I realized this week that perhaps I need some crop rotation in my spiritual life.

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, crop rotation is:

"the practice of growing different crops in succession on the same land chiefly to preserve the productive capacity of the soil."

Maybe the soil for these prayers needs time to rest and renew, and maybe I need to find a new spiritual crop.

Maybe it's time to toss some seeds in other places.

So I found myself wondering anew about the this parable.

The traditional interpretation of this parable invites us to think of ourselves as soil, and ponder how receptive we are to God's word. This is essentially what we sang in the opening song. That's a good way to think about this parable. Are we providing an appropriate place for God's word to bloom and blossom in our life?

But maybe there is another way to hear this parable. I wonder...

What if each of us is the sower, and we're trying to find somewhere that the seeds will grow?

What if we need to be seeking good soil where good things can grow?

For me, seeds used to grow with the John Baillie book, but there is no harvest right now. Maybe in six months or a year the Baillie book will be a huge blessing to me again. But it's not right now, so I'm tossing some seeds elsewhere.

Fortuitously, about a month ago, I signed up for a four-week prayer group, downtown at Upper House. We had our first gathering a few days ago, and it was a blessing. I'm engaging with God and prayer in new ways.

The Good News is that God wants us to keep finding ways to grow in faith, strengthening our roots, so our lives have more fruits—fruits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Sometimes the same old ways work just fine to keep us spiritually healthy and focused.

But sometimes, we need to explore a new path.

Maybe you need to throw some seeds in new places and see what grows.

Amen.