

“Faithful, Fearless, and Forever Our Foundation”

B, Pentecost 13; Hebrews 12:1-29

August 19, 2018; 10:00 am

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

INTRO TO WORSHIP

Where do we find a firm foundation?

For our lives, our faith?

Where can we look for God’s presence and teaching all around us?

How do we find examples of steadfastness, resilience? Wisdom in the ways of creation that give us guidance for living on this earth, part of the circle of life?

I. TREES TEACH US ABOUT FAITH

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12)

The Heavens are telling the glory of God.

The earth is filled with your love, LORD; teach me your decrees.

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”

How firm a foundation, ye saints, is shown to us in God’s word that is the natural world? For God reveals Godself to us everywhere we look. All around!

Our faith has its foundation in the word of God –the written word of scripture and the word that is the natural world.

How does creation declare the glory of God in its every breath, rustle of leaves, and unending growth – deep and wide? For our “cloud of witnesses” is not limited to human beings, but all created beings.

Consider the trees.

A living, breathing, visible, tangible part of our cloud of witnesses. The picture of steadfastness – reaching down deep with their roots, connected *by* their roots to one another in an endless interdependence.

Strong and sure core, connected to the roots for sustenance and nourishment, yet also reaching up and out for sun and light and warmth and water –in order to grow and thrive, and participate in the circle of life.

Steadfast. Still-standing. Sure and true. Even amidst the tempests of life. Trees are amazing, really!

I asked Siri: “How many trees are in the Bible?”

There are over 3000 species.

They are a symbol throughout scripture for a number of pieces of life:

--a symbol of permanence or long life

--of well-being

--as a means of execution or distorted vision

--As bearers of fruit

--As symbols of life and of knowledge.

We can learn much from trees – about life, and about faith.

For our faith forms the bedrock of our lives, much as trees form the bedrock of the circle of life that is creation. They are interconnected in ways we are only beginning to understand.

(Bulletin cover)

"We are all the leaves of one tree,
we are all the waves of one sea..."

— Thich Nhat Hanh

"The cathedrals we build reflect the sacred spaces that trees have already been creating for thousands of years. Next time you are in the forest, imagine this space as one of the primordial or original churches. A sanctuary that has helped inspire the creation of thousands of other sanctuary spaces."

~ Christine Valters Paintner

II. LIFE (AND TREES!) FIND A WAY

Have you ever seen a tree still pushing through; surviving, even thriving, against seemingly impossible odds?

What can you learn from studying a tree – how it grows, where it grow – in which direction, or many? Where have you seen a tree that starts going one way and then changes its mind? Or, does someone or something change its mind *for* it?

****SLIDES**

TREES THAT REFUSE TO DIE

by Sarreth Saany, an IT guy in India

Trees have been around for about 370 million years. There's a good reason why they've survived for so long!

Whether they're growing in the middle of gale-force winds, on the tops of rocky platforms, inside concrete tunnels, or even growing out of each other, trees know how to survive in places that few living organisms can, which explains why the planet is hot to around 3 trillion adult trees that cover an estimated 30% of the earth's land.

Considering that plants produce the vast majority of the oxygen that we breathe, we should all think ourselves very fortunate that trees are as resilient as they are. We wouldn't even be here if they weren't.

- 1) A place of enchantment
- 2) This Palm Tree Fell Over And Curved Right Back Up
- 3) This Tree Fell Over And Grew 4 More Trees Out Of Itself

4) The Only Tree That Survived The Tsunami In Japan Between 70,000 Trees.

Today Protected And Restored

5) Tree Of Life - Olympic National Park, Washington

6) A Tree's Root Spill Over The Sidewalk

7) Nature Finds the Way

8) I Found A Tree Growing Through Speed Limit Sign

9) Tree That Refuses To Die

10) This Tree Still Has Its Leaves Because Of The Light Shining On It

11) Life Finds A Way

12) Tree Roots Extend Across A Gap To The Mainland For Nutrients

13) Life finds a way (sidewalk)

14) Temple in Cambodia

15) My Grandpa Hung His Skates On A Small Tree When He Was Younger. He Forgot He Had Left Them There And Found Them Years Later

16) A tree growing on another tree

17) A tree growing out of another tree

18) This Tree Grew Out Of The Stump Of A Dead Tree And Then The Stump Rotted Away

19) A Tree Grows From Third Floor Window

20) Life finds a way

21) Spent Ages Staring At This Tree Before Taking This Pic. I Hope You Find It As Fascinating As I Did

22) This Floating Island That Grew At The End Of A Partially Sunken Tree

23) Wooden Chair My Parents Bought Started Sprouting Leaves

24) One Tree On My Street Refused To Accept Winter

25) My Sister's Tree Is Eating Her Fence

III. HOW TO KEEP A FIRM FOUNDATION?

How does reflecting on trees and their features and character, compel us to reflect on our faith? On the life journey we share with the trees, and we seek to stand fast, strong and true, living out our calling to be who we were created to be and to contribute to the earth?

What helps you to keep a firm foundation? To root yourself in the bedrock of the Divine Presence? What keeps you standing fast, roots stretching down deep?

They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17)

I shall not, I shall not be moved.....
I shall not, I shall not be moved.....
Like a tree....planted by the water....
I shall not be moved.

IV. ASK THEM TO TEACH YOU

Job 12:7-8 New International Version (NIV)

⁷ "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;

⁸ or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.

Ask of the trees – the roots, the stems, the leaves – and they shall teach you the beauty of the earth. Ask of the wind and the birds and they shall teach you the glory of the skies. The Holy Love which from our birth over and around us lies.

The faith which forms a sure foundation for our lives from the moment we are knit together in our mother's womb – and even before that! When God knew us from the beginning of time and called us his own – giving us a faith and a firm foundation. Like the trees firmly planted by the water. So that we may go out living those gifted lives, clapping and dancing for joy!

You shall go out with joy
And be let forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills
Shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the fields
Shall clap, shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)

Amen!

"Trees of the Field." (Closing hymn)

By Stuart Dauermann

The song's popularity is no doubt due to the Jewish-style music by Stuart Dauermann (b. Brooklyn, NY, 1944). Both text and tune were written for the Liberated Wailing Wall, the touring singing group of Jews for Jesus. It was first published in *Scriptures to Sing* (Lillenas, 1975). The infectious tune with its syncopations and hand clapping makes it a winner among contemporary Scripture choruses.

Find Us Faithful – Duet

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses

Let us run the race not only for the prize
But as those who've gone before us
Let us leave to those behind us
The heritage of faithfulness, Passed on through godly lives

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
May the fire of our devotion light their way
May the footprints that we leave
Lead them to believe

And the lives we live inspire them to obey
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone
And our children sift through all we've left behind
May the clues that they discover
And the memories they uncover
Become the light that leads them
To the road we each must find
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

SABBATICAL THEME 2019:

*Natural World as Word: Holy Presence, Renewal and Inspiration in
Creation—Then and Now.*

A1. *Summary*

What will make my heart sing?

What makes my heart sing? Singing! Creation! Learning!
Music! Exploring nature, ideas, theology, and new ways of
understanding human experience and our connection with the Divine.
All this renews, centers and fills my spirit. Continual learning, renewal

and recharge is what I seek to live out my ministry and life call to
love God and neighbor and also myself.

The theme for the sabbatical is “Natural World as Word”
from a particular theme of Celtic Christianity referred to as “Two
Books.” John Scotus Eriugena (9th c) expressed it: *God speaks to us
through two books: the 'little book' of Scripture and the 'big book' of
creation.*” My desire for sabbatical is to further explore Celtic
Christianity, already begun at CUCC, with a specific focus on this
“Two Books” stream, which also has parallels in Native American
spirituality. This will encompass study of nature, music, ancient
stories, sites and experiences.

I want to learn and share with my congregation how ancient
peoples of many cultures experienced the Holy in nature, hand-in-
hand with sacred stories and scriptures. I long to take my love for the
natural world, its beauty and its creatures to a new level of
understanding of God as “the One in whom we live and move and
have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

Travel to ancient holy sites and “thin places” both in Celtic
lands and the Southwestern US will be included, along with study
and learning closer to home. I experience *holy fascination* when

looking at the world through the eyes of ancient peoples—what they saw, heard, beheld with awe, wondered and feared. I want to understand how they “knew God was in this place.”