

The Roots and Fruits of life
John 15:1-8

Today is Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all mothers here today! On Friday, we enjoyed a wonderful Mother-Daughter banquet, one of Faith UMC's beautiful traditions.

Today, we celebrate and encourage all mothers. "Mother" and "Mom" are wonderful words, to kids and adults alike. We are lucky if we have someone to call "Mom." Without a mother (or a grandmother, or a stepmother), a house can feel empty. We all owe a debt of love to our mothers.

Whenever Mother's Day comes around, I think of my own mother. I visit her for a few days every year around her birthday. I feel sorry for my mom because she can't hear or understand me. However, she still loves to pray and sing hymns with me.

There are many proverbs from around the world about the importance of mothers:

The Biblical proverb tells us: "Do not forsake your mother's teaching."

A wise Spanish proverb says: "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy." A Middle-eastern proverb reads: "A child without a mother is like a door without a knob."

May the Lord bless and comfort all mothers through our worship service this morning!

I read a poem called, "Favorite Child," which included these words:

Every mother has a favorite child. She cannot help it. She is only human. My favorite child is the one: who was too sick to eat the ice cream at his birthday party; who had measles at Christmas.

Who had fever in the middle of the night. who was in my arms at the emergency ward. who lost the money for his class ring. who messed up the piano recital. who ran the wrong way with the football and who had his bike stolen because he was careless. All mothers have their favorite child. The one who needs you most at the moment.

Today's scripture reading, John 15:1-8, is one my favorite scripture verses. It paints a picture of life within the grace of God, using a grape vine as a visual metaphor. I own a stole that is embroidered with a grape vine, with a design based on John 15: 1-8. It was hand-made by a member of my last church. It was donated with a banner, altar cover, and pulpit and lectern cloths. When I left my last church, the donor asked me to take the stole with me. I continue to cherish this wonderful gift.

The parable of the vine represents the relationship between God, Christ, and us. In this parable, God is a gardener who takes care of a vine and its branches. Christ is the true vine, which is rooted firmly in the ground. And we are branches on the vine that must bear fruit.

The gardener has two important jobs: cleaning the vine and pruning the branches. By cleaning and pruning, the vine can grow and be fruitful. These jobs, cleaning and pruning, look similar, but have different purposes. Cleaning involves cutting away branches that have no hope of bearing fruit. Pruning encourages the branches to bear many fruit. God the gardener also uses these two skills on our lives, through judgment or through grace.

There are three important "trees" in our lives. First, there is a family tree. It is incredibly important that we build strong families and strong moral values.

Did you know that during the next hour, somewhere in America, 138 children will run away from home, 76 children will be tragically abused, and 9 children will be arrested for drug offenses? This is what happens in our nation every hour of every day. When a child runs away from home, they are cut off like the branches of a tree.

Sadly, the family has been under attack these days. The fifth commandment says: Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. What does this mean? When family life is strong, society endures and thrives. But when family life breaks down, it devastates society, because the home is the basic unit of society. Education begins at home. Self-awareness, respect for the law, concern for others, and love for God all begins at home.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son leaves his home to pursue his own way of life, only to end up in tragic circumstances. He demands of his father, "Give me my inheritance now!" Then he runs away. He thinks, "I'm my own boss, I'm number one. I'm not answering to anybody anymore. I can make it all by myself: I don't need anybody." He cuts himself off from his family circle.

Being cut off from the grace of God is the ultimate tragedy. Following one's own will without any direction or intention is the starting point of tragedy.

A second tree in our lives is the church. The church is a tree that God planted for His glory. In the Bible, the olive tree is a symbol of God's gardening. God's care of this tree in the Bible is an image of his care for the Israelite people. However, the people disobeyed God's will. The New Testament contains the image of God breaking off this olive branch and then grafting a wild olive shoot on to the original olive tree. The wild olive shoot symbolizes the gentiles, like us, who have been called to become part of God's family. That is the church. Theologically speaking, the church is the people of God, grafted onto those who

were called first, the children of Israel.

"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches." (Romans 11:17-18)

There are many branches on the tree: Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational, Catholic, and Episcopal, etc. We are one among these. We, the church are a tree which God has planted.

In early 1975, a large commercial airplane was taking off at a major airport. The flight attendant was walking down the aisle to see that all passengers had their seatbelts securely fastened. She came upon one man whose seatbelt was carelessly thrown to one side. Instantly, she recognized the man. It was Muhammad Ali, who was at the time the boxing heavyweight champion of the world.

"Sir," she said with smile, "you need to fasten your seatbelt." Ali grinned at her and, as only he could, said, "Superman don't need no seatbelt!" The flight attendant was quick with her response: "Honey, Superman don't need no airplane!"

We all need a spiritual seatbelt. We all need spiritual support. We all need, therefore, the church. Sometimes we get out in the world and we think, "I'm Superman or I'm Superwoman, and I don't need the church!" But you need the church. We need a sense of belonging.

A sense of belonging is a critical part of the social life of human beings. Sports fans are one group of people who feel a strong sense of belonging to the teams they support. When the game starts, the fans cheer their team's successes and regret their mistakes. From an objective point of view, there is no reason to support one team over another, other than a sense of belonging to the same town.

I have experienced cultural differences between western and eastern values in family life. In my opinion, a distinctive difference between the two cultures in family life is the relationship between parents and children. In oriental cultures, the relationship between parents and children relationship is a vertical relationship, while in western cultures, it is more of a horizontal relationship. In oriental cultures, filial duty is the primary virtue for children.

Eastern cultures see parents as roots for children and children as the branches. Parents would like to sacrifice for their children. And, the children show their love for their parents by acts of filial duty. It is rare for parents to live separately from their children. Of course there are many problems that arise in the relationships as extended families live together. But, there remains solidarity in the family

system in terms of mutual support. Aging is an inevitable process in life, but loneliness through the aging process is a problem may be more pronounced in the context of our Western society where extended families don't remain physically intact. Therefore, building up the church as a family is the goal of my ministry-to build up an intergenerational, cooperative, communal society.

Some have called this side of Western culture a "cut-flower culture," as opposed to a "rooted" culture. Like a flower arrangement, cut-flowers don't last long and cannot expect fruits from the cut-branches, even though the flowers themselves have many blossoms.

Teen gangs are a growing problem in cities such as Chicago. Last year, hundreds of school-age kid were shot and killed in the south side of Chicago. Many of these boys spent their days and nights on the streets, feeling cut off from society. The church, as the family of God, offers a second home to anyone and everyone.

The church stands in the world. But, it is rooted in faith, hope and love. Without roots, there are no fruits to bear. There are many institutions in the world but many of them have no roots in their foundation. The church should be a second family for those who are wandering and looking to belong somewhere.

The third and final tree is Christ, the tree of life for all humanity. The parable of the vine basically shows us that Jesus our Lord is the resource of life and provider of the fruitful life. The Lord is the rooted vine tree and we are just branches attached to the ultimate tree. This tree is the tree of live for all eternity.

Jesus emphasizes how important the relationship with God is, and also how necessary it is to be held in Christ. We discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is a legend in Europe. In the beginning of human history, heaven bestowed wisdom to human beings, but human beings abused the wisdom and brought conflict, hate and misfortune upon themselves. Then, the angels took back the wisdom from humans, which had been given for human happiness and success. And, the angels discussed this wisdom with one another how and where to hide them. One angel suggested that they should be buried deep in the ground. But, it was not a good idea. Another angel suggested putting it either on top of the mountain or dropping into the deep sea. But, it was also not secure. And, after a long discussion they finally agreed to put it into human hearts. Therefore, the human heart is the only place to find happiness. St. Augustine said, "Unless our heart is filled with God, our soul is restless."

Christ is a home for the homeless soul. Christ is the root of our life, which provides our needs for life and brings us good fruits in life. Through faith in Jesus, we can ask for whatever we need. Be sure if you are in Him. If you are

connected in Him, you will find out where you are connected in life. Asking is one the attitudes of believing. Turning to God in prayer, looking to God for all of our needs and for life itself is one of the most important ways of expressing our faith in God. "If you are in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples." (John 15:7-8)