

## **Trinity United Methodist Church**

### **Sermon #1**

(Disclaimer: This is my first online sermon, and if you are one, who will read them weekly, know that there will be minor errors here or there. Sermons are in the oral tradition, so the manuscript is of little importance. I do not plan on editing much. The chance that it will have errors in grammar and spelling is high. If you want the “real thing”, drop by on a Sunday.

Peace, Pastor Ali )

### **Transplants**

I’m a transplant. I’m ready to be planted. I am ready to be grounded, to be in one place more than a year. The last 4 years of college and 3 years of a master’s program have left me with the uncanny ability to move quickly and on a cheap budget. I’ve lived out of a suitcase at times, and have a long list of over 11 different addresses from the last years. I have been a transplant in and out of urban ministry, camping programs, suburban youth ministries, and rural parishes. I’ve made friends with those with little means, and those with a bit extra. I’ve picked up the subtle nuances of the various Midwestern accents as I’ve gone along, and gathered enough sermon illustrations to last at least 5 years.

Now it is time to be planted in one place. I moved in across the street and am setting up home little by little. As I spend time in the office, I am getting to meet some exceptional people who have passion for what they do. I know I am not just being transplanted anywhere. I am being planted in a great congregation of tradition, but also of recent growth and inspiration. All around me there are members who are inspired to become a part of Good News ministries down in Rodger’s Park, to lead Disciple 1 bible study, to support the food pantry, to coordinate with

Angelic Organics so we can distribute local and biodynamic foods for the neighborhood, parents who want to lead high school youth group because it made such an impact in their own lives, youth who want to continue their journey of faith through mission trips to Tanzania, and now Detroit, leaders who teach Spanish to children at Trinity Nursery School, and the list just goes on and on.

This is the beauty of having roots, being in a place where we feel like we are at home, a place where we know at least one or two of our neighbors, a place we can exchange dog or cat sitting, a place when we can turn off the GPS, and just drive because we know 3 different ways to get to our destination without getting lost, a place where we are safe, at peace, a place where we belong.

-A place where we can have a life of faith, and have meaning in our lives, a place to volunteer, a place to be a servant.

-A place to be healthy, to discover our passion, to meet others who can journey with us. That is the beauty of being planted here at Trinity United Methodist Church. We are growing together.

Yet, for a number of the growing population around us, it is difficult to find this grounding. In our culture, it is far more metropolitan to be fast paced, move when the timing is right, and find our community when we want it, and remain independent otherwise, to maintain the facade of functional independence as we increase the business in our own lives. It's not just busi-ness though...whether students, or snowbirds, the North Shore, as a whole is a community which is in transition as people move in and out over the years. We, as a congregation are a bunch of transplants. If we were to survey today we could see that there are people here from every part of the US, and some from further abroad; Nigeria, Haiti. Others of us travel often, we

start to feel the Diaspora within. When we transplants work and live in all corners of the globe how can we be grounded? It seems sometimes like we've been uprooted.

The prayer from Ephesians this morning is that we might be "rooted and grounded in LOVE so that we may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that (we) may be filled with all the fullness of God." The letter was written to a group of Gentiles, Christ followers of non-Jewish heritage who had never met the apostle who was encouraging them in the faith. The writer's intention was to encourage believers who were hearing stories and seeing martyrs being killed for the faith. He wanted to make sure that they found the mystery of salvation, that their faith would be worth it. Ephesians is a mystical book, very flowery at times as it describes the way of salvation through Christ.

Salvation to some is a concept that is simplistic in understanding. Are you saved or not? Are you going to heaven or not? It can become a game of ins and outs. To others it may be intimidating, and fear-creating. "Are ya saved?" The evangelist asks. We hesitate, our brains processing the situation. How do we respond? We have experienced the love of God. We are a faithful people. ...As time has gone on; I have realized that salvation is more than just a blank statement of providence. When someone asks me if I'm saved I ask myself "Was I saved, Am I being saved? Will I be saved in the future?"

Salvation is a growing thing. Did you know that the same root in Greek- sozo for salvation means wholeness, and also healing? Salvation, is wholeness, is healing. Salvation isn't necessarily who's saved and who's not. It is who was healed, who is being made whole, by the power of Christ? It is the question we ask ourselves, "Am I a whole person? Am I one who is healed? Am I grounded? When we are rooted and grounded in the Love, the love of Christ, then

we discover what is the broadness and the wideness and the inclusion of God's love. It has the power to save us from whatever we experience in this life. God's love has the ability to heal us, to cultivate within our inner spirit a feeling of wholeness. If we are rooted in the love of Christ, then we can begin to comprehend with all the saints the wideness of God's love... and then- then- tremendous things are possible.

I was watching Martha Stewart the other day while I was unpacking at the house. Yeah, I know Martha Stewart- queen of the matching wreath and table décor. She had a guest herbologist who was talking about transplants. He took the thick, waxy leaves of a foliage type plant from Japan, and snipped them into wedges and placed them in the soil. With some simple watering he said they would turn into seedlings. My initial reaction, wow, leaves can turn into plants! I mean, I guess I knew this because my mom would take bits of plants and put them in vases to help them take root, but leaves in dirt? Amazing. It blew my mind. What creativity God had when creating such things. Simple, yet so profound, a secret lost among the generations, like the secret to making jellies or pickled cucumbers, or the best method of staining and varnishing. In my generation, the millennial generation, far too often the emphasis is if I need something I will go and find it. If I want to learn, I'll find the best program, If I want to grow, I'll hire someone to get me where I'm going. Not that we wouldn't benefit from a physical therapist or life coach, but perhaps the ability to grow and flourish is more ingrained in our nature than we expect.

In an organic sense, just as these leaves can start sprouting roots, so we too can become grounded. The love of God in Jesus Christ transforms us so that we can become whole persons. It's in our spiritual DNA to desire a relationship with God's transforming love. John Wesley, the founder of what we call Methodism, called it prevenient grace; it's the love of God that comes before us, that calls us before we even know God. We feel our heart being tugged, and we

become as the writer in Ephesians says “strengthened in our inner being”. Wesley would have said “my heart has been strangely warmed”.

I have found that being rooted in God’s love is the only way that I will ever find complete wholeness. Being rooted means I am constantly searching for the nourishment for my life through the root system that is firmly grounded in love.

I first experienced that feeling of being rooted and grounded in love on my first youth retreat. We had gone out in the winter weather to play light up football which of course in youth group is the logical response to communion)...

...and as I followed that spirit in my inner being, I continued growing, and learning more about myself and the world around me, and I realized that God’s salvation is not just a what’s coming in the future thing. It’s not just a who’s in or who’s out. It is a transformation of who I am at my most inner core. It’s living a life of wholeness. It’s being rooted and grounded so I can see how wide God’s love is, it is being strengthened daily. Salvation is when God’s spirit comes into even the most broken parts of our lives and repairs each part lovingly.

Martha was getting applause for a simple act of nature. Something neither her nor the horticulturist had contrived. The plant has its way of growing. If it is taken care of, it will develop a good root structure. If it is watered, planted in the right soil, it will produce a large plant. This way of nature is mystical, showing us the way God works within us. The roots search for nourishment and water on their own, they branch out, sometimes wide, sometimes deep to anchor the plant and hold it firmly in place.

We are all from the same foundation, we each have a root system we have been given. Some of us have been rooted for long time, and others of us are transplants... looking for roots, and not just roots to feel at home in a place, but roots beyond a place of residence. We are

searching for salvation in every meaning of the word, to be part and to belong, and to be healed from every thing.

This is salvation. This is the wideness of God's love in Christ. This is the mystical nature of grace. It's bigger than we could ever understand, and it changes our lives from death to life, even daily, even moment by moment. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Amen.