



Grow: Good Soil | October 14, 2018

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"Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." (Colossians 2.6-7)

The first Christians, like Paul, are always reminding us about growth and what they refer to as *fruit*. It seems they never envisioned faith in Jesus as simply a theory to be agreed upon or a product to be secured. The life of a Christian, says Paul and his contemporaries, is dynamic and expansive; it moves; it grows.

And so a Christian life is not only a one open to change, but a life defined by change. This is Paul's language throughout his writing, and certainly in letters like Colossians: *Once you were in darkness, now you're in light. Once you were far off, now you've been brought near. Once you were dead, now you're alive.*

These are images of movement, of change. *Once you were one kind of person, now you are another.* Because, Paul says, of the life of Jesus; a life so imbued with God's love that it changed the world forever. Here is a God, as seen through Jesus, determined to help humanity discover what Jesus himself calls "life, and life to the full" (John 10.10)

And this, according to first Christians, is where we start - under the assumption that being Christian is about change; about metamorphosis. We aren't the same as we were yesterday, and we will be further changed tomorrow. Our trusting Jesus is the action that draws us deeper into God's action in us.

So part of being Christian means being on the lookout for change; being someone who expects to grow; someone who is becoming more of who they were created to be.

Good Soil

Last weekend many of us enjoyed a Thanksgiving meal of some kind or another. Much of what we celebrate in October is rooted (quite literally) in what the earth produces. We enjoy a colourful harvest in autumn made possible only through growth. Growth that takes time and takes the right the habitat; the right nutrients; the right soil.

This is the kind of language and imagery that Paul draws on when he writes to the young Christian community in Colossae. *Think of Jesus, says Paul, like you think about soil. By putting roots down into this person, into this relationship, you're plunging yourself into the very grounding of life itself.*

Paul also uses building imagery. Jesus is *the* foundation for all of life; the very basis for life itself; so Jesus is footing that we can trust. *"He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation....He is the beginning... the first in everything."* (Colossians 1.15-20)

So, Paul says that being Christian is first about what your life is built on; what the roots of you go down into; what you draw on for meaning and wholeness.

And here Paul might sound a little bit like Jesus when Jesus himself says in Luke's gospel, *"I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built."* (Luke 6.46-49)

The first Christians were clear that Jesus was the non-negotiable point of origin not only for being Christian, but for being human. Jesus was central; Jesus was soil; Jesus was sure footing.

Rooted in Something

But, warns Paul elsewhere in Colossians, there is other soil, other foundations we can build on. And this other soil, this other footing, is going to look attractive, dressed up in all kinds well-crafted arguments; the world around will make a strong case to burry our trust and found our lives on things other than God. (Colossians 2. 8-23). But Paul says that in the end it's all high-sounding nonsense. It's soil that leads to no growth; devoid of nutrients; devoid of life.

Jesus says a similar thing when he speaks about building on the right foundation: *Anyone who hears and ignores me is like a person who builds a house on nothing at all, and when the floodwaters rise, just watch, the house will fall apart.*

That's strong language from Jesus. *If you ignore me, if you root yourself or build your life on anything other than God's love and commitment to you, it's like building on no foundation at all. You'll end up in ruins, says Jesus.* (Luke 6)

That's overtly what Jesus and Paul warn us about. They both say: *make the right choice of footing; recognize the good soil of God's love shown through the life of Jesus and stay planted in that.*

But if we take a step back, both Jesus and Paul are also saying something about human life itself – how we operate as beings and persons. What point to is the subtle reality that every life is rooted in some kind of soil; every life grounded in something.

One of our seven core values as a church is *Worship*, which is a word very much connected with what Paul and Jesus are saying to us. Worship is not something humans choose to do. Everyone worships. You're a human, you worship, and you'll just have to get used to it. Everyone is in some kind of soil; every life is built on something.

This is what Paul means when he says the Colossians have "accept Jesus"; they've chosen to worship God, to be oriented by God over everything else. They've let God be the soil they plunge into, the rock they build on. And that means neglecting other soil, avoiding other possible faulty foundations. Sometimes painfully, sometimes uncomfortably, and usually with great intention.

This is what happens when we begin to realize that God doesn't live not on the margins. God isn't something we add to our online shopping basket to make us a little more content. God isn't even a relationship we could do or do without. God is, in reality to our life and all life, central.

So Paul says, let Jesus stand in the middle. And When Jesus stands in the middle, other things are displaced. When our "*roots grow down into*" or we "*build on*" Jesus, we're nourished and grounded by him rather than other various people or plans, products or powers.

So being Christian has very little to do with marginal life improvement or merely agreeing with a bunch of ideas about God. It has to do with asking the big questions of who we are as human beings, what or who our point of origin is, and how we're going to orient, root, ground our entire lives.

And so the beginning of growth as a Christian is to be mindful of exactly what Paul is saying to the Colossians:

You've found good soil in Jesus, the one who shows us what God's like, the only truly solid footing for life. Don't be lured away by cheap tricks and fleeting ideas offered on every corner. Stay in the good soil, soil worth sinking the roots of yourself into. Build on what you can trust is solid.

And in Jesus' words, *when the water rises your house will be safe on solid rock.*

Digging In

That leads us to another of our seven core values, *Spiritual Formation* or we could simply call, *growth*. Formation or growth happens through continuing to worship Jesus over the long haul; by soaking up everything we can from God, bringing us unto maturity. Growing up. That, we are told, is how we become fruitful people, or as Paul puts it, *overflowing* people.

Paul encourages the Colossians, *"let your roots grow down into God's love and order"*. Dig in. There is a sense of abandon that comes with these words.

Give yourself over, says Paul. Let go. Plunge, submerge yourself into this relationship..., give yourself wholeheartedly to the understanding of God's love, and let that grow you up into a human being of profound stature.

That's where growth begins. Growth begins with abandon. With plunging into the good soil. When we *put our roots down we find ourselves growing; b/c in the right soil, growth is a given.*

Discussion Questions:

- Where are my roots? Have I plunged myself into this relationship?
- How can I be on the lookout for growth?
- What does it mean to be a person increasingly open to God's change?