

2Easter2020

Aspens & Redwoods

We Need Each Other

I came across a story by a man named Steve Goodier in an article about trees and connections and how living things need each other to survive. Steve has lived most of his life near Colorado aspens. He says you likely won't find one growing on its own; aspens are found in clusters or groves. Aspens multiply from the roots and send up lots of new shoots every year. These become saplings that grow quickly and make new baby aspens of their own. In some groves, all the trees may actually be connected by their roots as if they are one tree.

He goes on to talk about another magnificent tree, the giant California Redwood, that may reach heights three hundred feet into the sky. They are towering trees with massive trunks that sometimes have tunnels carved through trunks wide enough to drive a vehicle through. It seems they would require the deepest of roots to anchor them against strong winds. But instead their roots are actually shallow -- they spread out wide in search of surface water. And they reach in all directions, intertwining with roots of other redwoods. Locked together in this way, all the trees support each other in wind and storm and share the water.

Aspens and redwoods never stand alone. They need one another to survive. People, too, are connected by a system of roots. Some families have deep roots that nurture and guide the new growth; some are like the mighty oak that many times stand alone and stately. We are not meant to survive long without others. And like the giant redwoods, we do best when we hold onto one another and help each other to keep standing through life's storms. We need others to hold us up, encourage us and to stand with us. We need the water of life and if we do not have it, we become parched. We are connected by roots to one tree – the Tree of Life in Jesus.

In this fragile time, consider sheltering in place as the Upper Room. We are told to isolate; to put our smiles behind masks; we are a species of connections that at this time we are told to keep our distance so that we might conquer this virus. Some of us forget to ask for help; or we try to save the world by doing something, anything, and forget that we are not alone, that we are connected and that our actions affect the whole forest. We are connected through the gifts of communication; telephone, internet, and mail, perhaps a hand waving from a distance.

In today's Gospel, the disciples are gathered in fear and confusion, they lock the doors and wait. They are frightened; they are in hiding. Then Jesus appears among them. His first words are "Peace be with you." No fear, no scolding, no turmoil, no doubt. Only peace. These are the words we say to each other, back when we used to gather for services together feeling safe: "Peace be with you."

And the Jesus confers a mission for them: As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This is their commissioning to go out and Be Peace and Love and Justice in the world. There is in this breath, is the echo of Genesis and "God's breath" breathing life into creatures at the beginning of creation.

It helps to remember how much we are really like those trees. It might be time to let others help hold you up for a while; Jesus calls us to be interconnected, whether, or perhaps someone needs to hang on to you.

And then, since this is John's Gospel, this is a Pentecost story as well - Jesus breathes the gift of the Holy Spirit into the disciples. It is their commissioning to go out and be peace and love and justice for the world. Just as God sent Jesus, so Jesus sends them into the world that God loves so well.

The gift of the Holy Spirit and the Resurrection are gifts given to us so that we can share them with the world, and in so doing, be part of God's transformation of this world. It sounds as if a personal, private faith is not what Jesus intends for us; instead, he wants a Spirit-filled church to be his gift to the world.

Jesus didn't tell the disciples, including Thomas, to stay in the Upper Room; Jesus says our roots must go beyond our doors, our rooms, and our buildings. Maybe God is doing a new thing. Maybe he is telling us to be peaceful in fraught times, to be together yet apart, to be the aspens and the redwoods, to remember our roots are connected and each has a place to stand and commune.

Peace be with you. Amen

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