

Grow Downward by Being “Rooted” Արմատացի՛ր

Romans 11:17-23

Matthew 13:18-23

Our main topic of this year is: “**Connected with God and Each Other.**”

Two Sundays ago we ended the service by reading the following:

Connected: Grow downward by being “rooted”

Connected: Grow upward by being “built up”

Connected: Grow inward in faith “strengthened in the faith”

Connected: Grow outward as you “overflow with thankfulness”¹

I would like to take the first metaphor about being rooted and dig deeper to see how God’s Word elaborates on this concept.

In the Armenian language, we ask each other “Where are your roots from?”

(*armadnert ourge yen?*) In other words, “Who is your family?”

When I was a child, my father published my grandfather’s memoirs called “The Best and the Worst Days of my Life.” In the middle of the book there was a family tree. I enjoyed reading the names on that tree. Some of the people I would personally know, some I had never seen, and some had passed away a long time ago... As the roots grew deeper, the tree gave more branches. I was always interested in continuing and filling in the names of the new members of the family tree. Now my niece is doing that.

Websites like *ancestry.com* have become very popular as people search for their roots. As Armenians, we generally cannot go far back in our finding our roots. During the Genocide, we not only lost most of our families but also the archives.

In the New Testament, we find the word “root” (Greek) *rhiza* 23 times:

It refers to three different explanations:

1. **The underground part of a plant** — ‘root.’²

2. **Figurative meaning (a):** descendant, with probable connotations of continuing relation. (*armadnert ourge yen?*)

3. **Figurative meaning (b):** that which constitutes a basic source or reason for an event or state — source, cause, reason.³ (“for the love of money is the root of all evil” 1Tim 6:10)

Let us see examples from the Bible:

1. Rooted in God shapes our identity.

In Romans chapter 11, Paul, a Jew, rooted in a Jewish family, describes how God invites the gentiles, the new converts who do not have the same Jewish blood (not of the same root) to the family of God. The **gentiles** were **grafted** onto the “**olive tree**”. Paul is challenging the Jewish converts **to be inclusive** in their understanding of God’s family. “You were chosen to be on this root. Now you have new people grafted onto this tree.”

Paul also **warns the gentiles** who were arrogant towards the Jews who had left the “olive tree”. These were the Jewish people who rejected Paul’s message of turning to Christ. Those branches were cut off from the main root. He warns the gentiles to not be arrogant towards those people.

“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, **remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.**” (Romans 11:17-18, ESV)

Paul is praying that those who were cut off will come back to the faith (Jews who rejected Christ). Paul warns both Jews and gentiles that being on the root of God is **not a privilege of culture, race, or color**. God’s kingdom is open to everyone, Jews or gentiles. **It is not a birthright anymore**. We need to be grafted on the main root. It is important to be rooted on God. That is the foundation.

We need to see that our identity is shaped by being rooted on God. If you are Armenian, American, fine. That is not enough to shape your real identity. We all, with our different backgrounds, are rooted on God. He is our foundation, and everything else is built on it.

2. Rooted means being fruitful

Jesus warned the Pharisees and Sadducees who were not bearing fruit and were thinking they were rooted on God:

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:8-10, ESV)

Stop thinking that it is your right to be a child of God. No, it is an invitation to anyone from any race, to come to God in repentance and brokenness. **It is an invitation to be fruitful, and not just rooted without any use.** This means we should learn To be rooted on God and not on your wisdom, race, strength, family, background....

3. Rooted in God is foundation of our Faith

Jesus told the parable of the sower. This parable is recorded in three gospels. A very simple parable, yet it is the **only parable** that Jesus interpreted. It is basic Christianity. What do I mean?

This parable teaches us to build a foundation for our faith. This parable is measuring one's faith. The seed is sown *into* the ground. The farmer knows that some will fall in tough areas (the road, hard rocks, thorns). Those areas have something in common: **the seed cannot grow roots.** No root, short life, eventually no life. When the seed is planted, it needs to be in good soil where the roots will be growing deep. Otherwise there will no fruit, no results.

Have you realized that the root of most plants is bigger than the visible part?

There is a reason that the root is larger. It is a good foundation. It absorbs water and minerals from the soil.

Another observation: **the root does not appear**; it is underground. **My faith, my foundation on God is hidden; it is private**. Your prayer life, your daily study, your quiet time, your spiritual nourishment is something private you will not show off and brag about. Yet without it, you cannot survive. It is like my piano exercises. A pianist will give a concert for an hour. In order to give that concert, the pianist needs to practice for thousands of hours... These are the roots.

4. Dangerous Roots

And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (Matthew 15:10-13)

Here is the problem. Satan also works hard to plant his seeds. His seeds also take roots in our lives. Seeds of pride; seeds of anger, seeds of hatred, seeds of war, seeds of lust...

In Matthew, Jesus told another parable right after the parable of the sower. It was the parable of the weeds. The evil weeds were planted along with the grain.

He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. (Matthew 13:28-29)

Paul mentions some wrong roots:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:10)

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. (Hebrews 12:15)

5. Let us be rooted in Christ’s LOVE

Our main topic is to be rooted in Christ. Paul wrote to the church of Colossae and encouraged them to be rooted in Christ. It does not matter what background you come from. It does not matter what past you have had. It does not matter who you are. If you believe and have faith in Christ, you are rooted in Him. You are an important member in the family of God. Not that you earned it. No, Christ made it possible for you to be grafted onto the olive branch.

Paul says it well in his prayer:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.(Ephesians 3:14-19, ESV)

1 The idea to Grow in different directions is taken from “Deepening Your Roots” by Brian Bill.

2. Lou and Nida Lexicon: the fig tree had withered away to the roots’ Mk 11:20. A literal translation of ‘withered away to the roots’ may be misunderstood, since the expression might suggest that the tree had withered only as far down as the roots but that the roots had not withered. The Greek text, however, indicates that the entire tree including the roots had withered and was completely dead.

3. Lou and Nida Lexicon.