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Some of you might recall a sermon I preached back in August, following a trip to California. In this sermon, I introduced you to Julia, who was a tour-guide at Frog's Leap winery in Napa Valley. If you recall, she taught me something new, something called "dry irrigation," a technique used at that winery in which the grapevines are not watered. Instead, their roots are forced to dig and fight down through the soil, in order to grow strong and deep and find the water they need to flourish. And, if you recall, I compared this to faith...meaning that sometimes, when things seem hopelessly dry in our spiritual lives, our roots of faith are forced to grow deep and strong, in order to search out the water that gives us life, which is, of course, the Living Water, which is, of course, Jesus Christ.

Today I offer you an alternative to the grapevine theory. Because, it has recently occurred to me that not everybody has roots of faith that run

deep...some people have roots that are shallow...and we have been raised to automatically think that those roots and that person were somehow bad, somehow weak. We want deep roots, not shallow roots, right? Well, let me offer you another possibility, a different way of thinking about roots of faith...and this illustration comes once again from sunny California, but not from grapevines. This one comes from the Redwoods.

The Redwoods, as many of you know, are those giant trees of the earth, the ones that are over 300 feet high, trees that have been around for hundreds of years, some of which were alive even when our very own country was discovered by Christopher Columbus. You've undoubtedly seen pictures of these massive trees; trees so massive that tunnels have been dug for cars to drive through them. To look up, to strain to see the tops, makes the neck ache from stretching and craning. These enormous trees truly are a sight to behold.

I always assumed that, in order for such massive trees to remain upright for so long, and for them to be able to grow so very big, they must have deep roots...how far, I did not know, 20 feet? 30? 50? But, as it turns out, this is not true. The Redwood trees possess no taproot. The taproot is that main root that most trees have, the one that aggressively burrows deep into the soil, anchoring the tree in the earth and digging deep for water and nourishment. All other roots branch out from this main taproot.

But, ironically, Redwoods, the tallest trees on the face of this planet, have no taproot. Their roots, it turns out, do not go deep...they go broad. That is to say, the Redwood roots spread out just under the surface of the earth; in fact, too much driving or even walking over these shallow roots can damage them, they are that close to the surface. And, what's more, as the roots spread and grow under the surface of the earth, new Redwoods poke out from these roots and begin to grow...and so all Redwoods are somehow

joined together, knit together by a common, underground network of roots, holding them together. Again, the Redwoods strength doesn't come from deep roots; their strength comes from broad, common roots.

And I think this describes the faith lives of many of us who are here today. Maybe you are one of these people. Maybe you don't feel like your roots run very deep. Maybe you feel like you don't have the depth of knowledge you should have—of the Bible, of Christian history, of doctrine, of liturgy, of whatever. Maybe you've always felt your faith just isn't very deep. And so maybe you have always assumed that means you are somehow bad, not good enough, not strong enough....that you are weak and easily knocked down...that you are somehow not as good as that person over there who seems to have deep, strong roots in their faith. So maybe you don't have deep grapevine roots. Maybe you have shallow Redwood roots. But that doesn't mean you are bad or worthless...

...it means your roots spread out and grow close to the surface.

Maybe when they are stepped on, you are easily bruised or damaged, but

that doesn't mean you're going to die, even though it might feel like it.

Maybe because your roots spread out, you sometimes feel like you are going

to fall over, like you don't have the strength or support to remain upright one

more day, but that doesn't mean you will.

So maybe you're a Redwood, where your strength comes not from

your depth, but from your breadth...maybe your strength comes from roots

that connect you to that one over there and this one over here and that one

way over there...maybe your strength comes from knowing that you share

broad, common roots with your neighbor, that you are literally bound

together by a common system, that your very lives spring forth from and

depend upon the same roots to give you the nourishment you need to live.

Compared to a Redwood, a grapevine seems tiny. The shocking secret of the grapevine is the depth of its roots, it is the hidden strength shrouded by a tiny frame, it is the tiny widow, giving her last penny in today's Gospel, her secret strength and courage coming from her deep roots, which have been forced to grow deep and strong because she is entirely alone in the world....She appears fragile and insignificant, but her deep roots in her faith give her the strength to part with her last penny.

...and the Redwoods are the disciples, called from various backgrounds, ones who struggle and wrestle with their faith, who at times are tall and mighty, and at other times seem to be weak and shallow, and we wonder why they can't walk on water and why they can't be there when he needs them and why they deny even knowing him and why they betray him and why they fall asleep while he sobs his heart out in the garden, leaving him to face his death alone

...their roots are not necessarily deep like those of the grapevine, like those of the widow, but their roots are broad...and they are also tied together by their roots, bound together by a common faith. It's a broad, lacy network of roots that lies just below the surface, invisible to the naked eye...it is baptism that joins us, one to another...to brace one up when it feels weak, to provide strength to one when it feels like it might fall over, to produce new, little ones who come from our same roots, little ones who will cry in church and throw Cheerios everywhere...all bound together by broad, common roots of baptism into Jesus Christ, who alone is the taproot of all humankind, burrowing deeper and deeper into the earth until he finally reaches hell itself, and destroys it...and in him we find the strength and nourishment we need to reach our branchy hands for the sky, heavenward, eagerly awaiting the coming of his kingdom, as the author of Hebrews today suggests.

And so, both have a place in God's creation... the tiny grapevine with deep roots and the giant Redwood with broad roots...and such is faith, at times deep and at times broad, at times astonishingly profound and at times shockingly shallow... but never weak, just differently strong.