

*Let It Go, Let It Be, Let It Come—The Spirit Moves*  
*...toward God*  
Ephesians 3:14-19

Most days, I'm pretty sure I have the best job in the world. This week, in one 24-hour stretch, I got to spend a grace-filled moment with someone who was within hours of her death and hold a baby who is just a month old. Every week it is part of my work to sit with a text of ancient wisdom and let it work on me until it seems like I have something to say to you that might make a difference in your life. It is holy work, and it is a great privilege to do it.

This week, it was this text from Ephesians—the verses we just read—that took up residence in my head. In a Bible that is filled with words and stories that are hard to decipher and that often sound more harsh than we think they should, this is a text that can warm your heart. It's Paul's prayer for the Christian community in Ephesus, and his heart is full of love. "This is my prayer for you," he says: that you will know "the [unimaginable] breadth and length and height and depth" of God's love for you...and that you will let that love sink into you until you are "rooted and grounded" in it. If you can do that, he wrote; if you could find your home in this kind of love, it would change everything. It would fill you up—with the very fullness of God.

That's a huge thought; a really big, ambitious prayer. We try so hard, and in so many ways, to get what Paul promises: to be filled up with something that feels like God. Whether we use that language or not, filling up our empty spaces is what compels us. And so, we work hard at being a good parent/spouse/worker/leader/helper. We self-improve (or at least we read books and magazines that tell us how to do it). There's a better way, Paul is saying here. A surer way. What does it mean--what would it look like—to be *rooted and grounded* in love? In God's love for you?

In the country of Niger, in Africa, there is an old tree, called the Tree of Ténéré, in the middle of the Sahara Desert. For years—many decades—people called it the most isolated tree on earth; there are no other trees, not even any plants, around it for miles in the dry, sandy desert where, to all appearances, there isn't enough water to keep *anything* alive. Until it was knocked down by a drunk driver a few years ago, that tree was a landmark. Caravan guides stopped next to it to pray before crossing the rest of the desert. People wondered: How did it stay alive, out there in the middle of a barren landscape?

And then in 1938, the French military dug a well next to the tree, and they found a water table 118 feet below the surface. That tree had survived because its roots had sunk deeper than any other tree or plant or seed had ever been able to do. In the place where a seed had been planted, that tree hung on through dry seasons and windstorms until its roots stretched down 118 feet—the height of a 10-story building. That tree had dug deep roots—stubbornly persistent roots—to find the water that was hidden in the ground, right underneath it.

Let's anthropomorphize that tree a little bit. Imagine that tree's train of thought when the water got hard to find. Maybe a moment of panic: should it spread its roots out laterally, search in

other places for the water that would nourish its young branches? If the tree had done that, it would have fallen over years earlier—the first time it was buffeted by winds. No...it's like the tree knew that this was its place, and that its only salvation—the key to its long and healthy life—was to go deep, to occupy fully its own spot in the desert. And so, through years when there was no rain, when no water came easily, it kept digging down, trusting that there, underneath it somewhere, was the water that would sustain it, give it what it needed for life. To be *rooted and grounded*...is to have found a place that is home, and to stay there until you can touch the goodness.

Often—maybe most often—you find that home in a relationship. I see this in people who have loved each other for a long time. A couple that has stayed together through a lifetime of mixed-together joy and hardship; or a parent and child who rest quietly, confidently, in their comfort with one another. Sometimes in friends who have learned they can depend on each other to be there every time they call. This kind of love is hardly ever expressible in words; it is too profound. It does not grab or cling; it trusts that it will not easily be broken. To be *rooted and grounded*...is to trust something even when it cannot be seen or spoken or grasped.

That kind of love can do powerful things to us. It changes us; re-orientes us. The movement toward another person—the urge to *fuse* with another—can be so strong that it almost *literally* sweeps you off your feet. You don't choose this kind of love; it chooses you. There is a reason we call it *falling* in love. It ushers you right in to voluntarily giving up control over the parts of your life you thought were just yours. It takes you somewhere beyond rational thinking. It de-centers you, puts someone other than yourself at the core of your thinking, your hopes, and even your fears. It blurs the line between giving and receiving, until they are the same thing.

This is how God loves you, Paul says.

God is madly, passionately, furiously in love with us. With you. God is besotted with you, follows you around until you notice, offers to forgive every betrayal. God is willing to act like a fool for love of you.

This is not often the story line we focus on, but it's there in the Bible. The story about the God who came looking for Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed the one rule they had been given. When their sin was uncovered and they felt naked and exposed, God made clothes for them so they would not feel ashamed. Think about the story of the God who could not let go of the covenant he had made with the Israelites, the lover who kept forgiving them no matter how many times those people complained, and worshiped golden calves, and whined that they wished they belonged to some other god.

Remember the stories that Jesus told to give us a picture of who God is: the shepherd who will leave 99 obedient sheep to find the one non-conformist who wandered away. God is the parent who is so crazy in love that he sacrifices every shred of his own dignity to welcome home a child who only came back because he had run through all the money.

This is not a God who stands before you demanding obedience. This is not a God who conditions affection on your good behavior or your right beliefs. This is a God who *yearns*, who

*longs*, for friendship with you—no matter what you've done or how messed up you feel. For a relationship that is mutual and authentic and free. No conditions, no ending date, no tests.

How could your heart not lean toward a God who loves you like that?

I think if we could really understand this; if we could really get it —that deep sense of how that you are seen and known and loved unfailingly, *unconditionally*— if we could internalize it deeply, until it carves out a place and lives inside of us—it would change everything. It would change the way you judge and demand accomplishment from yourself. It would keep you from being constantly disappointed in other people, who can never see you quite clearly enough, or love you as unselfishly as you want to be loved. It would help you look for less from *things*, possessions, which never quite fill that empty place inside of you. It would make all those barriers you put up to keep yourself safe feel irrelevant, unnecessary. It can soften your heart.

This is the kind of love that can *root and ground* you; where—if you trust and if you stay in it—your best, most whole self will thrive and flourish. Look for that love, he says, Paul is saying to this community to whom he is pastor. Whatever you're doing that keeps you from seeing it, whether it's moving too fast or being so stuck you can't see past your own skin, stop. Falling in love is what I want for you, he says. For you to fall, *over and over again*, in love with God. That you will live *rooted and grounded* in that love. If it hasn't happened to you yet, stay with it. It will come as it always has from the very beginning: by your knowing and understanding the breadth and length, the height and depth of God's never-ending, unconditional, passionate, love for *you*.