

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper  
Sunday, November 7, 2021  
Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost in Ordinary Time**

**“Rooted in Wisdom”**

**First of a three-part sermon series entitled “Rooted in Love”**

**Christian Scripture: Mark 12:38-44**



I spent most of yesterday pulling-up tufts of grass that grow in my gravel driveway at home. Also, I used a gardening tool to remove, what are apparently called, 'lithophytes' in the cracks in my paving. Next, I removed crabgrass from my little shrubby garden in front of my home. Last but not least, yesterday, I removed lots of poison ivy from the edges of my property, as Ana is particularly allergic to it.

As a new home owner, I have come to learn that plants are tenacious. They can seemingly hold-on to bare rock. They seem to grow back miraculously. And I

have found that plants are often very difficult to remove. I must say, this summer has been the first time that I have had physical fights with plants. I huff and I puff; I pull and I heave. I breath heavy and so often come-out the loser in tug-of-war contests with plants.

That I do astounds me. I am a six-foot-tall mammal, physically fit, and relatively strong. Those little buggers are a hundred times smaller than my mass. Yet they cling to such an extent that sometimes all my strength is required to extract them.

Plants are one thing; trees are another. It is virtually impossible to remove a tree by its roots. Almost any tree that is not a sapling requires massive machinery to extract and even then, not. Cutting and digging are ultimately required as no amount of pulling will remove a tree from its location. Ultimately what gives the plants and trees their strength are roots.

Plants seem delicate. But they are anything but! I have noticed that roots vary as much as the plants that they anchor. Some roots are deep – often deeper than the plant is high. Often the roots branch out, web-like in all directions. I have noticed that some plants have roots that seem to frustratingly detach from the plant so it is often impossible to remove the roots. Other roots, like those of poison ivy, are linked underground to other plants. So, to pull-up a plant requires one to pull-up the plant, its roots, and other plants and their roots simultaneously.

They are linked and thus more difficult to remove. One thing I have learned is that which makes plants strong are their roots.

Of course, in addition to anchoring plants, roots harness and funnel water and nutrients to them. “A root originates at the lower portion of a plant embryo or seedling. Root tips and tiny root hairs—which are not always visible to the naked eye—gather and absorb food and water from the soil. Larger roots—which are easily seen—store nutrients and water and transport them to the upper parts of the plant”.<sup>1</sup>

Our stewardship campaign this year is entitled “Rooted in Love” and we are asking all who benefit from and enjoy the ministry at Centre Church to invest in the roots of our church. After its founding in 1816 and its transplanting in 1843, our church has clung tenaciously to the soil here on Main Street. We have survived the Civil War, fire, World War I, the 1918 pandemic, the Great Depression, World War II, the death of many saints, the 1960s and the Vietnam era, sometimes bitter ministerial transitions and vacant pastorates, and now another pandemic caused by COVID-19. Perhaps the biggest threat to our church is the increasing secularization of our nation and our state. Yet, Centre Church remains tenaciously firm and in place.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Albert, “Plant Roots: A Guide to the Basics”, *Harvest to Table*, no date provided. Found at: <https://harvesttotable.com/plant-roots-guide-basics/>, accessed November 6, 2021.

Friends, what will keep us rooted on Main Street is not our history and heritage. Not enough people in this day and age value those. Friends, what will keep us rooted on Main Street is not our endowment, for as we know that can be eroded as can the sand upon which a house is built (Matthew 7:24-27). Friends, what will keep us rooted on Main Street is not the industry of boards, committees, or even of the minister himself. Rather, our ministry will only continue to thrive if we are 'rooted in love'. God is Love (I John 4:16). Jesus the Christ is the incarnation of Love. The church is the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5). All of us are the members of the Body of Christ. If you and I are not rooted in love, our church will be lost. For our church to remain relevant and viable in this community love of God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39) and love of Creation must be the be all and end all of our ministry.

In our scripture reading today, Jesus noted the motivations of those who gave financially to the faith community of first century Judaism. Most of the motivations related to the accumulation of power and prestige. Jesus contrasted these motivations with the motivation of the poor widow. The scripture does not state what the poor widow's motivation was for giving all that she had. One can speculate that it was obligation. Yet, I doubt it. Technically speaking, she, you, and I are obligated to give a tenth of that which we earn to the work of the church. Yet, obligation is not a worthy, nor a sustainable, motivation. What motivated the

widow was love: love of God and for the faith tradition as represented by the Temple and the priests.

In the coming months, we will hear from the Long-Range Planning Team (LRPT) a proposal how to *wisely* utilize funds contributed to our church. We are rooted in wisdom. We have a treasurer, a Finance Committee, and an Endowment Committee that will take the recommendations of the LRPT and the decisions of members and *wisely* allocate funds to support the vision of our church. We are rooted in wisdom. Friends, we have a minister, administrator, music director, and sexton who has and will continue to *wisely* use their skills, time, and energy in a manner that forwards the vision of this church. We are rooted in wisdom.

Thank you for beginning this Sunday your journey of discernment of the degree to which you will support the vision of our church with your pledge. It is my prayer that you and I will be rooted in love. And that which is given will be *wisely* invested to further the vision of our ministry.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, "Amen!"