

Rooting for Our Roots!

[Text - Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23]

Pastor Dave Shackle
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“A sower went out to sow. As he sowed....some seeds fell on rocky ground....When the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.”

In order for plants to live and grow, survive and thrive, they've got to have *roots* - something that connects them to the earth and keeps them grounded; something that allows them to take-in the Life-giving water and nutrients that sustains them in good times and in bad - in seasons of plenty and in days of drought.

In order for people to live and grow, survive and thrive, we've got to have roots - something that connects us and keeps us grounded; something that allows us to take-in that Life-giving *stuff* that sustains us in good times and in bad - in seasons of plenty and in days of drought.

This morning's Mardi Gras Service offers us an excellent opportunity to *root* for our *roots*:

To cheer and celebrate the wonderful ways in which our lives are connected to one another, and interconnected with the entire spectrum of Life;

To appreciate that Life-giving *stuff* that gives our lives substance and meaning that helps make our existence exciting, challenging, and worthwhile.

It's also an excellent opportunity to contemplate the Divine Mystery and Majesty behind it all; and to reflect on ways in which you and I can continue to grow and deepen, develop and connect with one another and with the Holy One.

One of the marvelous things about the Cleveland Roots ministry, is that it's not just about helping people have better access to healthier food; it's about building healthy and wholesome relationships throughout the community. This includes offering community events and education; programs and partnerships; providing a place to grow produce, and to cultivate deep and lasting friendships. Similarly, our ministry here at Brecksville United Church of Christ involves more than offering the Sacred Sacrament of the Potluck Dinner. [Yes, I *know* that for certain people here today, that's the big draw!]

Actually, there's a lot to be said about the benefits - and the blessings - that come from gathering together at table to share a meal. It is one of the premier signs of hospitality, throughout the Sacred Scriptures. And it's a primary way in which Jesus demonstrates his undying commitment to welcome and include *all* people - especially those who are routinely pushed-aside, excluded, and discounted by religious groups or by society in general. One of the major criticisms Jesus' adversaries level against him, is that he is "a glutton and a drunkard" who "eats and drinks with tax-collectors and sinners!" [It sounds to me that Jesus might feel right at home at a Mardi Gras Celebration!]

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus emphasizes that the Life-giving Word of the Divine Realm is to be freely extended to *all* people, regardless of where they may be along Life's pathway. And this sower, like a boisterous bead thrower on Bourbon Street, displays a generous and expansive attitude - one which suggests an overflowing abundance of material being distributed. Of course, it's not beads or seeds that you and I are called to spread; it's the message of the Divine abundance of welcome and grace, compassion and love. Now, how we convey this message will certainly vary according to our circumstances.

It can be expressed in our words of encouragement and support for those who are hurting or struggling, bullied or abused, belittled or oppressed.

It can be seen in our acts of goodness and generosity, patience and kindness, compassion and care.

It can be revealed through our positive attitude, our joyful spirits, our non-judgmental demeanor, and our inner-peace.

The opportunities to express and extend Divine Love unfold before each of us every day, and in every situation you and I encounter. And while, at times, this may feel like a heavy burden, it's important to remember that we are never alone in our efforts.

The Holy One - who makes us Holy, and makes us One, keeps us rooted and grounded *together*. Not only are we are connected through our local communities of faith and service, we are also interwoven into a global family of Life-affirming people of every faith and every nation. And the more we work together to show and to share a Divine compassion and graciousness, the deeper rooted and more naturally ingrained that compassion and grace becomes in our lives. So even when we are apart, we remain forever connected by that living, loving Christ-like spirit within us.

After our potluck dinner is over [*and* the dishes are done...] you and I will leave this place to scatter into the world. It's world that is fractured by fear and divisiveness, meanspirited and ignorant political rhetoric, bigotry and hatred, war and violence.

Nevertheless, it's a world that is also waiting and longing - hoping and hungering - for peace and wholeness, kindness and love. Our mission, is to take the seed of the Living, Loving, Divine Word that we celebrate here, and freely scatter it among the fertile fields - *and* upon the hardened pathways, the thorny situations, the rocky cracks and crevices - of our broken, yet beautiful world. We do so, trusting that this seed will firmly take-root, be fruitful, and multiply - sometimes in places and people we might least expect.

Fortunately, the seed of Divine Love is extremely potent stuff -

able to produce thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold! And like a big barrel of beads on Bourbon Street, there's an overflowing abundance of this Good Word to freely spread around. Therefore, there's no reason for any of us to ever hold back!