**6 Easter May 5, 2013 Acts 16: 9-15; Ps 67; Rev 21: 10-22:5; John 14: 23-29;**

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In today’s Psalm, we prayed “***the earth has brought forth her increase, may God….give us His blessing.”***  It is a Psalm for a good harvest.   Today we are observing Rogation Sunday, an ancient custom in our tradition where we ask God to bless our crop yield for this season and where we recognize how we are stewards of the earth.  Whether we are farmers or gardeners, or just consumers of food, we are all affected by the success of the annual yield.

One of the important factors affecting crop yield is the soil. Back when I went to school at Madison, I took a course called “Soil Science.” I wasn’t too sure what soil was exactly. To me, dirt was dirt.  As I proceeded through this course, my respect for the importance and complexity of dirt/soil increased.  I even mapped 40 acres of a farmer’s field identifying its many soil types!  Areas with the best soil have the tallest corn.   I have had vegetable gardens in Illinois, Texas, New Mexico, California, Wisconsin – and oh my, what a difference in soil types!  In Texas, the soil was light brown and either sandy (water shot right through it) or clay (the little water there was stagnated and roots had a hard time getting through the heavy soil).  In central Illinois, where I had my most productive garden, the soil was black, naturally rich in nutrients, draining just at the perfect rate.  What A PLANT is rooted and grounded in matters.

This plant metaphor works for us too, because what WE are rooted and grounded in matters a whole lot.  St. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 3:17-19, “***you, being rooted and grounded in love,may...comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height (***of***).. the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*** In other words, if we are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, we will have abundant lives. Our vitality, in all aspects of our lives, is dependent upon where we are anchored, and where we look for our strength. So, this morning's question is: In what are you rooted and grounded?

Our Gospel today is part of Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" which He delivered to the apostles the night before He was crucified. In it, He was preparing them for what was to come by building them up with His perfect, overflowing love. He has just told them He will not leave them desolate, and now He reassures them that the Holy Spirit will come for them when He is gone from the earth. He says, ***"...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit...will teach you everything...Peace I leave with you..***.***Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."*** This coming Thursday, is the feast of the Ascension, the day when the risen Christ ascended into Heaven -- 40 days after Easter. In just two weeks, we will celebrate Pentecost, 50 days after Easter. Pentecost is the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in our Baptism! Jesus did not leave us orphaned, for God is always with us and we are offered complete connection with God. So, when we are rooted in God's love, when our bodies and minds are drawing spiritual strength and nourishment from God, then we are filled with peace, no fear, no troubles in our hearts but rather rejoicing.

But wait a minute -- in our world we are bombarded with messages of fear and scarcity all the time. It is difficult to avoid hearing the news, and the news is rarely good. If we don't have enough financial stress at home, we can have our financial stress meter rise just by listening to the economic news. It is a world of limits. In the life of plants, they have what are called "limiting factors." For plants, there are several factors in addition to soil that can limit growth, like sun, rain, nutrients. If there is not enough sunlight, then the sun is the limiting factor.  If the ground is too saturated and there is not enough oxygen for the roots, then this is the limiting factor.  The news can be a limiting factor for us, blocking our ability to absorb God's love. Are you holding up an umbrella or wearing a raincoat keeping God’s grace and love from penetrating you fully?

God is constantly showering His love and grace upon us; it's like refreshing light warm rain falling on us all the time--so light and wonderful that we don't need an umbrella or raincoat to keep it out. As we receive it, bask in it, our faith increases. One of my favorite contemporary Christian hymns by Todd Agnew is called “**Grace like Rain:” hallelujah, Grace Like Rain falls down on me And hallelujah, And all my stains are washed away -They're washed away...**"

In our lives, we determine our own limiting factor by the choices we make in our lives. There is enough of God's love to go around, it never runs out, there is enough for us.  So, we have a choice: we can chose to block God's love and grace by living lives of fear and scarcity, or we can chose to live lives of abundance, based upon the Good News of Jesus.

Please turn to page 304 in the Book of Common Prayer, about 3/4 of the way down the page. These words are the promises we made, and make every day, as we live into our Baptisms as Christians: **"Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?"** And at the top of the next page we are asked, **"Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ." And how do you respond?** "**I will, with God's help.**" When you chose to respond this way, then you are saying that you commit to be rooted and grounded in God's love through prayer, worship, service, and His Word in the Bible.

Today, as you ponder who you are rooted and grounded in, review these words and the commitment you made at your Baptism. Resolve to live into your Baptismal covenant. If you are rooted and grounded in fear, skepticism, and scarcity you are going to be wilted, pale, unhealthy with low yield, just like plants that don't grow in good soil, with limiting factors. If you are rooted and grounded in the vitality of Christ’s light and love and Word, we will experience abundance: we will yield much fruit, have much life, be strong.  Just as those new plants will come up in the fields soon, we are created anew by Christ through the power of His resurrection. On this Sunday when we celebrate God's creation and the upcoming season of growth in the fields around us, let us also celebrate God's love for us. Chose to live fully into the Resurrection, in accordance with God's plan for you, and flourish.

Let us pray together the collect for today, found on the front of your Bulletin: **O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**