And growing up, we mostly lived in apartments with little to no yard. As a result, I don’t know a whole lot about plants or gardening or roots and soil.

When my grandmother lived with us, she did always manage to plant things in tiny, little spaces that somehow surprisingly grew, into edible food. I once heard someone say that poor people have been doing urban gardening for generations before it became “cool.”

Somewhere there is a picture of me at about age 8, cutting a cucumber off a vine, but posing for the picture is about as much work as I put into it.

Perhaps many of you are like me. Most Americans living today buy our food; we don’t grow it. So when scripture draws upon agrarian themes and images, as it often does, we don’t always fully understand what the original authors were trying to convey. And some things do get lost in 2000 years of translation.

Today’s scripture, is actually not the most agricultural. Usually stories like the parable of the mustard seed or the good soil come to mind, or Jesus saying, “I am the vine, you are the branch.”

Today’s scripture, in fact, is quite lofty and larger than life. Paul writes:

“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

There is something of that which is beyond us in this passage, something that surpasses our knowledge and understanding. Kallistos Ware, a bishop in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, who by the way, tend to do a little better with mystery than we Western Protestants ordinarily do, says this:

“God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder.”

And he reminds us that “it is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery.”
There is an element of our faith that is beyond our comprehension. It often takes us into liminal and unclear spaces. It leads us from easy, pat answers towards mystery.

Rev. Victor Floyd will explore this in even more depth at tonight’s Contemplative service at 5pm in chapel: “The Cloud of Unknowing.” So please join us again to sit and to be in that mystery.

Last week, as we studied the second chapter of Ephesians, we talked about how God leads us not just towards liminal spaces, but out of our comfort zones, out of what feels familiar and easy.

Last week’s sermon was a challenge, a challenge to risk reconciliation by reaching beyond what we know and experience daily. And, it’s true, Christianity shouldn’t be comfortable. It takes us to unknown places, challenges us, and invites us to hard, but necessary work.

Bonnie Thurston, a New Testament scholar says this:

> The main theme of Ephesians is God’s plan to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, which was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The author’s vision is cosmic. He understands that God’s final purpose is not only human reconciliation, but also unity and harmony in the universe. The church, with Christ as its head, is the means of accomplishing that purpose.

The church is the means of accomplishing that purpose. We have received a rather high calling. And perhaps it seems formidable. It certainly does to me from time to time. Perhaps change seems to come much too slowly while people’s lives, livelihoods, humanity and dignity are stripped much too quickly.

Maybe you’ve come today tired and on the verge of hopelessness.
Maybe you’ve come today angry, with hate chomping at your back.
Maybe you’ve come hoping that cynicism and apathy don’t swallow you whole.
Or maybe you’ve come because someone’s dragged you here, or because you didn’t know what else to do.
For whatever reason you have come to this hour of worship, hear this:

> You are loved unconditionally by God.
> You are loved unconditionally by God.

And there’s nothing you can say or not say, nothing you can do or not do to to separate you from that love.

When you come through the doors of Calvary Presbyterian Church, we hope that you will be challenged and even made a little uncomfortable, but we hope all the more, that you will experience the breadth and length and height and depth that is God’s love.

That alone is sometimes enough. That alone is sometimes all we need to do as a church.
But that love is transformative. It changes us. And because of that love, because we have experienced it, we respond in gratitude. We respond by asking how then we can love God back with all our hearts, mind, body, and soul. We respond by serving God and serving others.

But that is only possible if we are rooted and grounded in God’s love.
All that we hope to accomplish, all that we seek to do beyond the walls of this church and in our daily lives is only possible if and when we are rooted and grounded in God’s love.

Because then and only then, is it possible for us to reach our long-range plans and goals.
Because then and only then, is it possible for us to love one another as God loves us.
Because then and only then, is it possible to do what God calls us to do.
All that we hope to do, all that we hope to accomplish, is only made possible if we are rooted and grounded in God’s love.

Paul knew this. Even as he wrote to the Ephesians of a God who is beyond our knowing, even as he wrote of the church’s role in bringing about cosmic reconciliation, he emphasizes a very grounded and rooted faith. We are after all, made of the earth.

No matter how urban our lives are, no matter how removed we are from nature or the soil, we are of the earth. From dust to dust, ashes to ashes, earth to earth. When God creates the first human, he is called in Hebrew “Adam” because he is made from the adamah which means earth.

One Old Testament scholar explains that it’s like saying, “he shall be called Dusty because he’s made of dust.” We are of the earth, and no matter how high our calling is, we need to be rooted, we need to be grounded.
And the soil in which we grow and thrive is God’s love. God’s love for us, and God’s love for creation and God’s love for each and every person on this earth.

When our roots receive the nutrients from that soil, anything is possible. Paul says we can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or even imagine. But only if we are rooted in that love.

You all know by now that I don’t know much about roots or soil. So when I used to read this, I would imagine one large tree with one large root going down deep into the earth. One individual root at a time grounded on its own, receiving what all that it needs.

But here’s what I’ve learned: most trees don’t have one large taproot that goes deep down. Some do, but many don’t. And most trees, even if they do have a taproot, as they mature and grow, it gets smaller, and its root system actually spreads more widely than it does deeply. Many different kinds of roots are necessary for a tree to grow, roots that reach sideways as well as roots that reach down.

Here in northern California, we are blessed to be near some of the most amazing trees in all the world: the redwoods. The redwoods are some of the tallest and largest trees of all God’s creation. Yet they have no taproot whatsoever. Instead, they have a shallow, wide spreading root system.

And they don’t grow alone. These majestic trees grow in groves or families. And the roots of these trees don’t compete with each other for resources, rather they fuse together, intertwining with other sequoias. And it is through this combined root system that they are able to receive the nutrients they need to grow tall and then wide. And the more they are intertwined and reliant on others, the better they are able to withstand winds and other forces that might knock them down.

What an amazing way to be rooted! Not alone, but together, where the whole is stronger and healthier than the individual.

I don’t think Paul had redwoods in mind as he wrote about being rooted and grounded in love. But I do know, that as he writes, the “you” that he uses isn’t in the singular form. It is the plural you, the great southern: “y’all.”

He addresses the church as a whole, not us as individual members. So when he says that Christ dwells within you, it is the whole the community, the church, as we are being rooted and grounded in love.

Our rootedness reaches out to one another just as much as it reaches deep into the love of God. We must be a root system that supports the whole, because we are better off when we help one another rather than when we seek to only help our own individual selves.

And we are rooted and grounded in that one love, from which we are able to get together and make this world just a little more “alright.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.