

Sermon, May 14, 2023
1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21
“Faithful Followers: Not Alone”
Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor



I like having visuals to put up during the message. I think it helps us, and some of us are visual learners or have more of a visual memory. And I wanted to show you a picture of someone today, but it wasn't easy. I was looking for a picture of Tom Crowe. I first met Tom and Sharon Crowe in my first church because they were members of the church in a town not very far away from my church. We often had them come when they were in town and speak at our church. Why?

Because Tom and Sharon were missionaries. Oh, not like Hudson Taylor, Jim Elliott or even John Wesley. It is easy to find pictures of those folks, as you have seen. Tom was a farmer, and Sharon was a nurse. Two of the most unassuming people you would ever meet, and maybe not the type you would say

they should be missionaries. But God called them to the continent of Africa. Because Tom was a farmer and Sharon was a nurse.

Tom passed away I believe last year, and while I did not see a picture, I did find an obituary, and it was probably the best obituary I have ever seen. Only a few words and as unassuming as they were. It said simply this. ***Tom and his wife Sharon were responsible for saving countless lives.*** I don't know if you can have a better legacy or obituary than that they were responsible for saving countless lives.

Sharon was a nurse, and she put together a clinic in the village in which they lived. Who knows how many people she saved by medication and educating them about clean water hygiene, better health practices in general. Sharon was a nurse.

But Tom was a farmer. It's what he knew and what he did best. He taught people how to farm, what type of crops to grow, what would grow best in the areas the people lived, he introduced new crops to them. It allowed them to take care of their families and to feed not just themselves, but to feed the villages. Tom was a farmer and Sharon was a nurse, but they were so much more. They saved countless lives.

What made Tom so good at what he did was that he understood the importance of roots. The root system of a plant is critical. If the roots are bad, the plant will not flourish. And if it has roots that need a different soil, it will not flourish. Some plants have roots that need to go deep into the earth, connecting them, holding fast, and supplying the plant with nutrients. Other plants have shallow roots, they don't go deep, they spread out, and they don't hold up well to the weather that might bring storms. But in a rockier area, the shallow roots will go out if not deep, and you can plant certain things there that will provide you with food and grain to take care of yourself and your family. And the village, if necessary.

Roots are important. Whether they are the roots that go deep into a rich soil or they are roots that go out finding sustenance where they can find it, all plants need a root system in order to grow. It is hard to grow when you are rootless. It is hard to survive if you have no roots. Plants and people, we all need roots.

Where are yours?

This morning on what I hope is a wonderful Mother's Day, we continue our series on Faithful Followers. We are to be faithful followers of Jesus, His word, the scriptures, but also following Him in our own intimate relationship with Him. But we are also to be faithful. It is a consistent walk with Jesus day in and day out, moving deep in your faith with Him.

As we follow Jesus, we begin to have our lives reoriented by Him. We become who we were created to be, and He reorients us to living in the right side up kingdom of God. And one of the things that happens when He reorients us when we become faithful followers is that He affects our root system.

That reorientation is needed. It's so needed. Very often when I do some research when preparing something for a Sunday morning I'll look up different terms to see what might pop up. Especially, as I said, if I am looking for visuals for the message. I was looking for plants that have shallow roots. I put in the word *rootless*. The results surprised me. I thought I might see lettuce or tumbleweeds, they have shallow roots. That is not what came up. What I found was rootless people. Who are the rootless people? What does it mean to be rootless? It seems we have an epidemic of feeling as if we have no roots. And it's easy to see why, isn't it? We have an epidemic of fractured families that have compromised the root system so crucial to our well-being as we grow up. For many, coming to church on Mother's Day is hard because they may have lost a parent and feel disconnected. Others never felt that connection and carried resentment around the holiday. I know some people who will purposely not come to church on a day like this because they simply cannot, it's too painful. The longing for a root system anchoring them, helping them make sense of the world, is too painful.

The last few years have created a sense of our not having roots in our families or in communities anymore. We cut ourselves off from loved ones, we experienced loss, yet couldn't actually grieve, we work more from home or remotely than we ever did before. And there are some benefits to that. Yet, what I hear from people is that while they like the convenience, they feel cut off from community. They feel adrift, without roots. Alone, the feeling of isolation can be overwhelming at times.

But it is in that feeling of not having roots, of not having community, to being isolated, Jesus speaks a powerful message to us. I want to go back to our Gospel lesson read a few moments ago. Jesus is preparing the disciples for His leaving, not just the cross, but His ascension into heaven. He will not be with them in person as He has been much longer. He knows how alone they might feel, how cut off they might feel, how rootless and adrift they might feel. But He says this. And I want you to hear this. If you have come today and felt alone. Ever felt abandoned, ever felt adrift or felt as if your root system has been torn away, I want to hear what Jesus says here. Underline it in your Bible, read it every night before you go to bed.

Jesus says ***but I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you.*** Oh, please hear this. Hear what Jesus says, ***I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you.*** You might feel alone. You might feel isolated, you might feel as if you have no roots, no one understands. But hear the words of Jesus, He will not leave you orphaned. Not that I will take away your bad feelings, but I will release you from feeling as if you are orphaned and have no roots. Jesus says *I will not leave you orphaned.* There is a reason the Scripture says that He is the father to the fatherless. Not He will get you over not having a father, but He will be your father, He is the father to the fatherless. Jesus says He longs as a mother to draw us in under His wings to love and care for us.

When we become a faithful follower of Jesus, we are given roots. Roots in our relationship with God, He loves us and cares for us. You are loved by God, you need not feel alone. Jesus says He is the vine into which we are grafted and became a part of His family.

He brings us into the family of God. You are not alone. Now, like any family, it will not always be perfect, you may not always get along. But you are loved. If you feel abandoned, if you feel as if you have no roots, God wants you to know you are His and His child in His family, you will receive the great inheritance of His life and His riches and graces of the holy Spirit.

I love how Jesus says I will not leave you orphaned. I will I come to you. Jesus comes to you. Right now. No matter what you have done. No matter what sins weigh on your heart and spirit, Jesus comes to you. Imperfect. Sinful, guilty, it does not matter. Jesus comes to you not because you deserve it, but because He loves you.

Our hope for you today is that you will experience that love. That you will be rooted in His love for you. That you will no longer be orphaned, but loved in the family of God. Amen.