

Tethered  
Ephesians 1:11-23  
The Message

**11** It's in Christ that we find out  
who we are and what we are living for.  
Long before we first heard of Christ  
and got our hopes up,  
he had his eye on us,  
had designs on us for glorious living,  
**12** part of the overall purpose  
he is working out in everything and everyone.  
**13** It's in Christ that you once you heard the truth  
and believed it (this Message of your salvation),  
found yourselves home free  
- signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit.  
**14** This signet from God  
is the first installment on what's coming,  
a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us,  
a praising and glorious life.

**15** That's why,  
when I heard of the solid trust you have  
in the Master Jesus  
and your outpouring of love to all the Christians,  
**16** I couldn't stop thanking God for you  
- every time I prayed,  
I'd think of you and give thanks.  
**17** But I do more than thank.  
I ask - ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ,  
the God of glory  
- to make you intelligent  
and discerning in knowing him personally,  
**18** your eyes focused and clear,  
so that you can see exactly  
what it is he is calling you to do,  
grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life  
he has for Christians,  
**19** oh, the utter extravagance  
of his work in us who trust him

- endless energy, boundless strength!

**20** All this energy issues from Christ:  
God raised him from death  
and set him on a throne in deep heaven,  
**21** in charge of running the universe,  
everything from galaxies to governments,  
no name and no power exempt from his rule.  
And not just for the time being, but forever.  
**22** He is in charge of it all,  
has the final word on everything.  
At the center of all this,  
Christ rules the church.

**23** The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world;  
the world is peripheral to the church.  
The church is Christ's body,  
in which he speaks and acts,  
by which he fills everything with his presence.

Have you seen the PBS show, Finding Your Roots, with Henry Louis Gates Jr.? In the show, Professor Gates explores the ancestry of dozens of influential people from diverse backgrounds, taking [millions of] viewers deep into the past to reveal the connections that bind us all.”<sup>1</sup> He has professional researchers comb through paper trails and records; scientists who use DNA to uncover the background stories of his guest’s ancestors. Gates team searches and scourers each person’s past - retracing the journey their ancestors took, to see what they share with the men and women who literally laid the ground work for their success.

The most recent episode featured two celebrities with similar backgrounds; Eric Stonestreet and Melissa McCarthy; both are Midwesterners who left their family’s farming backgrounds to pursue careers in comedy and acting.

McCarthy’s journey starts with her paternal grandfather who came from Scotland. He was Michael Carty in Scotland, one of seven children, growing up in harsh conditions working the industrial row of Scotland’s iron industry.

Her grandfather Michael never talked a lot about his father, Thomas, because Thomas (McCarthy learns) died of pneumonia at 45, when Michael was only 6 years old.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/weta/finding-your-roots/about/about-series/>

So, there are no stories, no history of her family from before her great-grandfather leaving McCarthy to feel that her roots really didn't stretch very far. On the show she learns the truth of family lore; a story that could never be fully confirmed - that her great-grandfather immigrated to Scotland from Ireland because of the extreme poverty that overtook the Irish landscape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

She was shocked to find out she had deep Irish roots, not Scottish like her family had (somewhat) suspected. Gates' team was able to trace back her great-grandfather, Thomas, to a single parish in central Ireland and found generations of the Carty family. In the episode, she stares at the names from her Irish family tree and says, "I've never seen these names, no one knows these names. ***Now somehow, I feel tethered to something and to a place.***"

Turning to Eric Stonestreet, Gates begins with his maternal grandmother, Helen, who was born to German immigrants in Kansas soon after the start of WWI. Gates tells stories and gives a historical background for her life that Stonestreet never knew. During WWI, German immigrants were viewed with heavy suspicion in the US and many were made to register with their local authorities as "an alien enemy."

In spite of all that when the war ended, Stonestreet's great-grandfather Wilhelm, who Anglicized his name to William, filed for US citizenship. Eric doesn't speak German and neither did his parents or grandmother - and it is no surprise that after German immigrants were treated so badly that many of them left behind much of their German heritage. But as Stonestreet reflects on this, he says, you know a lot of our food and cooking had a German influence; *most of us connect to our heritage through food.*<sup>2</sup>

To me, those two sentiments, of feeling rooted to people and place, and connecting to our heritage through food are two deeply rooted realities we experience in the church. Yearly, in fact we are eager to trace our own roots and heritage. Just last Sunday, we celebrated the Protestant Reformation - the 502<sup>nd</sup> anniversary some 4,479 miles away from where it all began.

In honoring our Reformed Presbyterian roots, we harken back to years ago and use words like bulwark and fortress in our hymns and liturgies. We enjoy the crooning of bagpipes. Some of us even wear a tartan or plaid; to tether us to a history and people of long ago.

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<sup>2</sup> Both McCarthy's and Stonestreet's stories come from, PBS Finding Your Roots: Season 6, episode 2 Premiered, Oct. 15, 2019 <https://www.pbs.org/video/off-the-farm-u1lqm2/>

We remember those priests, the parish church workers, those men and women, the saints of old, who paved the way for our intellectual and spiritual freedom in worship and faith.

Recently, Alan Harrill hung all the portraits of former FPC pastors on the hallway wall outside of Whit's office. Rev. Thomas Thurston was the second pastor of this church, following the founding pastor, Reverend George Gibbs. Thomas Thurston began his call in 1879, (*140 yrs. ago if you are counting*) and Rev. Thurston, split his time with us and the church in Taylorsville.

Sadly 5 years later in 1884, he and his daughter Alice were crossing the Catawba River on their way to Taylorsville and drowned. Their remains were buried in the church yard at the old Presbyterian church - which has an historic marker downtown. But when the new church was built in 1905, they were moved to Oakwood Cemetery. Some of you have friends and family buried there too. And just like that we are tethered and rooted to people and place.

Bread pudding is a holiday treat many love. I'll be honest, it is not a dessert I like, but for most of the years that I can recall, around the second week of December, there in the workroom, the smell of butter and bread would fill the staff hall. Plugged in on the counter would sit a dish of fresh, warm, homemade bread pudding, made by Betty Bowman.

Bread, milk, eggs, I don't know what all went into this dessert, but I do know that when I see bread pudding listed on a menu, or smell bread pudding in a restaurant, I think of Betty Bowman - her gift, quietly given, year after year, to show her love for our staff during the Advent season. Tethered and connected to each other, to our church family through food.

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus reminds the church then and the church now that we are tethered most importantly to Jesus and then to each other. This passage ends with Paul's reminder, "The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence."

And the beginning of the passage tells the body, the church, "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for." Those are beautiful words. Words that are life giving. Paul's assertion is that in our shared ancestor, this rabbi from Galilee, this Jewish boy born to Mary and Joseph, this messiah and savior; in tracing our many and varied heritages and our adoptions in this family back to him, **we find out who we are.**

Think about that for a moment.

Our identity is found and given form in who Christ is. And that means the that at the core of who we are, we look to a son, a man, a teacher, who lived for and served others. We find at the core of who we are, are people who model a savior who stopped at nothing, not even death, to show everyone and everything that God's purpose for life, is the kingdom's advent, which is life in abundance. A life that is tethered to the ongoing cycle of community and creation; life that is given meaning in the good purposes and will of God.

Part of the appeal of Finding Your Roots, is being able to see the histories of Gates' usually famous guests become people with special ties to a grandparent; with Cher or Terry Gross, or Bryant Gumbel with stories and histories, just like you and me. In fact, many of those stories and histories bind us together - as Midwesterners with German roots, or people who can trace their ancestors back to Scotland and Ireland and so many other places. When Gates makes history come alive, in hearing about the hardships our ancestors endured and the many lands they emigrated from, we find we are all tied to the same history and story, the same heritage and roots. In the same way reading Paul's letter to his churches or hearing stories of Jesus is meant to remind us that this is our shared heritage and family.

Years ago, I remember Bob Sauer at the Jr. High Heritage Luncheon talking about his family's (I believe it was) German heritage; I was in awe of how much he knew, how he'd traced a family line through the years and of course how it connected to music. I'm still fascinated by seeing pictures of my paternal grandparents when they were children. I relished the spring my mother and sister and I traveled to Indiana and were able to see the home where my maternal grandmother grew up on the shores of Clear Lake.

Without stories, without looking back and understanding where we have come from, it is hard to imagine the many distant generations who came before us. We need the retelling of our roots and our heritage.

Long before there was ever a me or a you, some of our great-great-great grandparents sat in meeting houses to pray, to sing, to shush their children while the minister preached. Though this moment we can only see those of us who are gathered here, generations of Presbyterians have gathered in this place to sing, to celebrate the seasons, to baptize babies and to bury loved ones, *together as a family of believers*. Think of Rev. Thurston's congregation, gathered to hear the gospel story, the promises of God; think of them preparing for us - because as Paul says that was God's will all along.

J.D.G. Dunn writes, "Jesus himself is the 'place' in which the blessings of heaven and the Spirit are to be known in the here and now, so that the very term 'Christian' denotes a life (and death) bound up with his."<sup>3</sup> It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.

In a favorite TV show of mine, the dad asks his son, "what have I always said was the most important thing?" The son quickly and incorrectly answers, "Breakfast." "Family, son;" the dad replies, "family is the most important."

Unlike other places and people, the church because it is Christ's body is our family tether, our generational tether, our tether across this life and the life to come, our tether of saints past and present. The church fastens us together in Christ, who like Paul says, has had his eye on us for the overall purpose he is working out in everyone and everything. This is the work of the church as Christ's body for it to fill everything and everyone with Christ's presence.

May we find comfort in that - that Christ is working out his purpose, not in just you or just me; not just the saint in Bible study that reads his Bible every day and lets scripture roll off his tongue; not just the saint who volunteers her time at every Habitat build, and Sabbath Soup Kitchen - but Christ, Paul affirms, is working out God's good purpose in everyone and everything. In the New Testament, "Saints are both young and old, both living and departed; they are all who have responded affirmatively to God's call."<sup>4</sup> In that wideness, in that depth of time and space across oceans journeys and immigrated great-grandparents, in Jesus's life of grace love and mercy, we find out who we are.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, where we will name our church members who have died to this life and have been welcomed into the life eternal. We give thanks for their witness and their hard work and commitment to serving Jesus and loving God's people. We give thanks and remember the saints **in our lives**, our friends, our family members, our loved ones, who were instrumental in helping us live into God's will for us all. We give thanks and remember trusting that Christ was working out his good purpose in them. Remembering the saints brings us to the table.

This table, though it does not look anything like the tables in our houses, this is the table of this house - where this meal tethers us as a family together.

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<sup>3</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, "Ephesians," in the Oxford Common Bible Commentary, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1168.

<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Dunham, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4 (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) pg. 231

This is the meal, the food that ties us to our shared heritage and gives us meaning. This bread and cup are the food that binds us together with the saints in these pews and the saints of glory. With Paul and Anna and Teresa and Martin and Calvin and Wesley and Thomas and Al and Nan and Betty.

This is our shared heritage, the table that tethers us together and reminds us that in bread and cup, we share more than a meal, we share lives that are lived for others, we share in the life abundant that overcomes death; this is the place, in Christ where we share who we are and what we are living for.

When we hear the names spoken in our liturgy; when we see the names on the friendship pads passed down the rows and pews, when we celebrate the feast of our Lord: remember that you are tethered to a place and to a people and to something much bigger than we can imagine and hope for.