

Rootless or Rooted?

Since I was 18, I have moved house 23 times, which, if you have served in the forces, isn't that much, but still equates to, on average, moving at least every couple of years. But, however many times I have moved, I have still had a sense of rootedness, which was earthed in the persons of my parents.

Even after Mum and Dad moved from the house in the Fens where I grew up, and where my mother had lived since she was 12, my roots travelled with them to the south coast where they settled in their latter years.

But now that both my parents have died, I have been left with a sense of rootlessness. And, losing my familial foundation has caused me to ponder deeply the notion of rootedness, what it means, and how we might think about it when that which we felt had rooted us is taken from us. Is it possible to still find ourselves rooted when life either becomes, or has always been, rootless?

People, like plants, need roots; without them we cannot survive, we will have nothing to nourish or sustain us. Sadly, when people feel rootless they can all too easily sink themselves into anything – healthy or otherwise – that promises a sense of community and connectedness; that will offer to fill up the emptiness left by a lack of soul nutrition. The recent hit Netflix series *Adolescence* demonstrated how easy it is for young people to absorb the extremism and negativity masquerading as community online, and the terrible consequences of putting roots into such toxic soil. Extremism of any kind is a dangerous position, not least because it threatens the true wholehearted, healthy connection that can only be achieved by listening to and accepting others.

Before his dramatic conversion to 'The Way' of Jesus on the Damascus Road St. Paul had his roots firmly embedded in extremism dressed up as strict religiosity. His encounter with Jesus meant having to dig up those tribal roots that meant othering, judging, and dividing the world into 'us' and 'them'.

Paul became rootless – giving up not only his roots in extremism, but in a set base. A peripatetic wanderer, Paul had to find a different kind of rootedness. He found it in a more generous, compassionate faith that is demonstrated in the deep love and connection he expresses in his letters to his friends and companions in the fledgling Church. This new connectedness, based in love of God and neighbour, is kind, accepting and open to all (whatever some malformed projections of the church might preach). The Church, in its truest form, is not defined by politics, factions, nationality, skin-colour, gender or identity. We do not change our manifesto from one season to the next but remain rooted in our love for God and for each other. We believe that we are one family, and we live that out in the way we treat friend and stranger alike.

I am new in the Savernake Team. In one sense we do not know each other from Adam, but, in another, deeper, and far truer sense, we are already family, or, at least, have the potential to be. For me, that is most clearly expressed in the Christian Church, but those roots, I believe, are connected through a subterranean system that is the basis of all truth faith, and the foundation of our humanity: love, which we call God.

I have a photograph of my mum and dad by the chair where I sit and meditate and pray. The photograph reminds me of the loss of the roots I grew up with, as they were embedded in those special people, but it also acts as an encouragement. I feel, now, that they are saying to me, 'go on now, take what we gave you and pass it on'. So, my notion of rootedness has expanded, as my idea of family has expanded. I already knew that rootedness lay not in a particular place, but in the people who I loved, and who loved me. What needed to grow further was my idea of who could fit into that category, and I have come to understand there are no limits.

The Church is not perfect, as no family is perfect, but we share a root system that connects us and grounds us in love. If you are searching for that rootedness, please come and say hello at any one of our 12 churches – savernaketeam.org.uk – we would love to get to know you.

With love, Sue
Team Rector, The Savernake Team