

RESET- WEEK 1-

Setting Your Roots

<< Scripture Reading >>

Opening Conversation:

- New Normal:
 - We've heard a lot of new phrases in this season. We talk about the new normal. We're advised to engage in social distancing. We're attempting to flatten the curve. My favorite has been, that we're living in a time that is "unprecedented."
 - You may be sick and tired of hearing these terms, or talking about this at all, but the truth of the matter is that we are living in a watershed moment in our lives.
 - This is a pivotal moment.
 - We cannot ignore it. We cannot close our eyes and hope it passes. We must be proactive.
 - **The decisions we make in this season have the power to shape our lives.**
 - A common refrain that I hear repeatedly, and even one that I have said a time or two, has been, "I can't wait to get back to normal."
 - There's nothing inherently wrong with this.
 - The time we find ourselves in is challenging. We didn't choose to live like this. We don't like it. We aren't satisfied with it.
 - We are uncomfortable with the status quo.
 - This is a good thing. Comfort with the status quo is not something to pine for.
 - We are often too comfortable with the way things are.

- Nostalgia: pining for the way things were.
 - Perhaps for the first time, we find ourselves nostalgic, not just for the 40's and 50's or the 60's and 70's, or even the 80's or 90's, but we're nostalgic for...January...
 - Which in the North Country is something...
 - A common thing on Facebook this month has been sharing the last “normal” thing you did before all this happened.
 - We share photos of the “before times”- literally people are calling the time before March 22 (when New York on Pause began) as the “Before times.”
 - We miss life from before.
 - Perhaps you're missing a lot. I know I am.
 - I miss our church worship gatherings.
 - I miss hockey.
 - I miss potlucks
 - I miss BBQs
 - I miss campfires with people.
 - I miss meeting for coffee.
 - I miss Buffalo Wild Wings with my crew.
 - I miss people.
 - **But in our nostalgia, are we in a hurry to return to a normal that wasn't healthy or good?**
 - The danger of nostalgia is that it whitewashes the past.
 - We pine for the 40's & 50's because we don't remember polio or segregation or the wars we fought.
 - We rarely remember clearly the past that we long to relive. We only remember the good things.
 - Healthy, introspective people may look back and seek to learn from their past, but only when they see it

clearly for what it was.

- The wise author of the book of Ecclesiastes cautions,
 - ***“Don’t long for ‘the good old days.’ This is not wise.”*** (Ecclesiastes 7:10)
 - The NIV puts it: ***“Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.”***
- In our hurry to return to the good old days of January, is it possible that we are anxious to return to something not worth returning to?
 - Should our goal be “getting get to normal?”
 - **Don’t pine for normal when normal wasn’t working.**
 - We were too stressed.
 - We were too busy.
 - We were overwhelmed.
 - We were overworked.
 - We had too little time for the important things because we spent too much time on the urgent.
 - We were too focused on ourselves at the expense of others.
 - We spent too much money.
 - We saved too little.
 - We had too much debt.
 - We had nothing to give and nothing to save.
 - We slept too little and relied too much on coping mechanisms.
 - We drank too much.
 - We ate too much.
 - We were overmedicated.
 - We thought little of God and too much about us.
 - **Normal wasn’t working.**
- **What if we were given the chance to hit the reset**

button?

- What if, out of all of this, we found that we had an opportunity to change our normal, to find a new normal- a better normal?
- What if God wanted us to not just go back, but to move forward?
- **We were never meant to just let life happen to us.**
- God invites us to find a new life, a better life, one that sees us healthier, thriving, and in the center of his will.

○ Jesus said, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”***

○ (John 10:10)

- Too few of us would describe our lives as abundant. Full, yes, but not abundant.
- So, what does abundant life look like? What is the life that Jesus invites us to live?
- How can we participate in it?

- **The life that Jesus invites us to partake in begins at the beginning.**

- Perhaps the most “duh” moment out there, but if we are going to rebuild our lives, we have to get back to basics.
- We need to focus on the foundation of our lives.
- Paul reminds us of this in Galatians 6: ***“Do not be fooled: You cannot cheat God. People harvest only what they plant. 8 If they plant to satisfy their sinful selves, their sinful selves will bring them ruin. But if they plant to please the Spirit, they will receive eternal life from the Spirit.”*** (Galatians 6:7-8)
- To put it the way of another translation: ***“For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”***
- **What harvest is my life planting for?**

- If you reap what you sow, what am I preparing myself to receive?
- **Jesus invites us to reorient our lives around him, to root ourselves in him, and to find new life and purpose.**
 - John 15:1-11: *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*
 - Jesus goes on to say: *“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”*
 - The image of a vineyard is likely foreign to most of us- many of us don’t grow grapes for food or wine. We buy our grapes from the store. We buy our juice or wine from a store too.
 - But Jesus’ audience were all too familiar. It wasn’t uncommon to have a small vineyard on your property. In an agrarian society, even if you weren’t a skilled viticulturalist, you had a basic knowledge of how it worked.
 - They knew that good, usable, delicious grapes didn’t just happen. They had to be cultivated, pruned, and

even trained.

- The skilled gardener knows that it takes work to reap a rich harvest. Work and time.
- Left to chance, the vineyard will at best grow bitter grapes, worth nothing, wanted by nobody.
 - At worst, it will grow no fruit whatsoever.

- There are two questions that we must ask ourselves as we begin to look at the life that God invites us to live, and as we begin this series called Reset.

○ The first question is: **1) Where are we finding our nourishment for life?**

○ Jesus invites establish our life in him, to find out nourishment in him. *⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*

▪ When we look at our lives, we often only see our outcomes: the results of a lifetime of decisions we have made or reactions we have to the decisions of others.

▪ **Too often we miss the inputs that dictate those outcomes.**

- If you focus only on the outcome of weight loss, but ignore proper diet and exercise, it is unlikely you'll ever achieve that outcome.
- If you focus on wanting to sell your home, but you do nothing to prepare it for sale- you don't fix the problem places, clean it up, and present it in a way that is appealing to buyers, it is likely that we won't achieve that outcome either.
- **What we feed ourselves determines our health.**

○ Jesus invites us to find our nourishment in him, to connect

ourselves deeply in him.

- Jesus said, ***“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”*** (John 7:38)
- This has always been God’s hope for his people, that they have abundant life, that they have metaphorical rivers of living water.
- In fact, during a season of rebellion, God lamented that his people had abandoned him as the source of their life and instead had chosen a source of lesser nourishment. Through his prophet Jeremiah, God speaks in Jeremiah 2, verse 13: ***“My people are guilty of two evils: They have abandoned Me, the spring of living waters; And instead, they have settled for dead and stagnant water from cracked, leaky cisterns of their own making.”***
 - A desert-dwelling people longed for streams of living water- rushing, loud, raging rivers. These were bodies of water that never threatened to run out.
 - Entire civilizations sprung up strategically around bodies of water. In fact, if you look at most of the most influential societies, you’ll find a major waterway close by.
 - A community with living water would be foolish to choose anything else.
 - In the absence of living water, people would turn to digging wells.
 - Less than ideal, but workable most of the year. Wells weren’t entirely reliable. In arid, dry regions, they would sometimes dry up in the summer.
 - Finally, at the lowest rung was cisterns.
 - These were large clay pots embedded in the ground used to collect rainwater or to store water carried in jugs from distant wells or rivers. Water

in cisterns was stagnant and often became fouled in the heat. They would attract mosquitoes and could become a cesspool of disease.

- **Living water meant abundant life, but only as long as we were connected to the source.**
- **Don't entrust your life to a substitute.**

○ Jesus invites us to abide in him. Abide is not a passive act of not moving, but a conscious act of reaching out and grabbing on, refusing to let go.

- It's not a choice we make once and for all, but a day-by-day, even a moment by moment decision we make. It's an obedience that we engage in that creates room in our schedules for the giver and not just the gift.

- And it's in this continued obedience that we discover the joy that for which we have so long been searching, the joy that so many overpromise, but severely under-deliver.

○ Last week we talked about the mission that God has for us, the commission that Jesus gives us, but before God can do something through us, he has to do something in us.

- **Jesus is less worried about your fruit than he is where you are rooted.**
- **Are you rooted in Christ? Are you finding your life in him? Or are you settling for a substitute?**

○ **The end product, the fruit, of our lives is the result of where we get our nourishment. Our lives will be fruitful when we choose to abide in Jesus.**

- The second question we must ask ourselves as we begin to look at the life that God invites us to live is: **2) What must be pruned from our lives to make room for healthy growth?**

- Come back to John 15:1, ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.”***
 - Pruning is so counterintuitive to the uninitiated because it seems on its surface that it’s harming the plant. The very idea of wantonly hacking at a vine doesn’t make any sense to me. If you look at a video of somebody pruning, it sometimes can seem as though they are cutting at random, cutting too much, and cutting too far.
 - And while it makes sense why you’d cut off a dead branch or rid the vine of dead leaves, it seems like a waste to cut a healthy, fruit-bearing branch. Why punish the branch for doing its job?
 - Macintosh apple tree- full tree- big and beautiful, inedible fruit
 - Didn’t bear fruit because it untended
 - Needed pruning
 - Dan Hartman hacking at it
 - It looked ugly now! But now the sun could get through, now the fruit-bearing branches would receive better nutrients, now the fruit would be delicious.
 - Now the tree would serve its purpose.
 - Pruning is counterintuitive. It cuts healthy branches, not to punish them, but to promote growth.
 - **The nature of the vine is to grow where you cut it.**
 - Biologically, the plants are designed to send added nutrients and energy to the ends that have been cut.
 - Even further, where the cut is made, often two or three shoots will form at the place of cutting, so we’re not only talking about additional growth but sometimes exponential growth.
 - **None of which would not be possible if the master gardener didn’t lovingly, expertly, faithfully prune the branch.**
- Jesus says that our lives need to be pruned.

- And looking at our lives in the before times, it's hard to argue that our lives may have been full, but they were far from abundant.
- We may be full, but are we fruitful?
- **Could it be that God wants to use this season to prune some things out of our lives so that this upcoming season will produce healthy fruit?**
 - I don't believe that COVID-19 was part of any divine plan, whether it be divine judgment or otherwise. We could look for signs all we want, but unless God makes that clear, I don't see that as something that he did.
 - But I do believe it's something he will use.
 - New York on Pause- suggests that we will hit play and pick right back up.
 - What if instead, God was offering an upgrade?
 - What if Jesus offered new life that was far better?
 - **To receive the life that God wants, to be fruit as God intends, we must be willing to make strategic cuts that promote healthy growth.**
- **Where is Jesus pruning in this season?**
 - **(INVITE TEAM)**
 - What areas do you need to excise from your life?
 - What unhealthy things are keeping you from thriving?
 - What good things are keeping you from what's great?
 - What urgent things are keeping you from important things?
 - What full things are keeping you from abundance?
 - **Sound off: What is something you've found in this season that God is asking you to change? What is God asking you to embrace as part of your new normal as we step into the next phase of life?**

- **Remember: Pruning hurts, but it will not harm.**

- The life God is leading us to is one that is far better than the life we are building for ourselves, but it's one that requires us to

abide in him and embrace the pruning that he administers.

- **Jesus invites us to abide in him, to stay connected to the vine, and to allow him to remove all that keep us from abundance.**
 - This is an act of surrender.
 - It's an act of obedience.
 - It's a decision to dwell in the stream so of living water, when the cisterns seem so much easier.
 - It's not being content to settle for the status quo, when God's best is available to us.
 - **Don't settle for OK when God offers you his best!**