

—{1}. **Acts 2:42–47** **Roots of Growth**

A. ‘Roots’ —{2}.

1. The young coast-guardswoman was approaching 40 years old when he decided to leave a 20-year career and become a writer. Writing was not a steady job in 1959. He lived on short rations in the storage room of an apartment building in Greenwich Village. Hunger and cold tempted him to better paying careers in other fields, but the urge to write kept him struggling on. In 1965, examining public archives, he came upon records of his maternal great-grandmother ... and this started him on a quest.
2. A quest that had him tracing his family’s history back for six generations to a Virginia slave called Toby who insisted on being called ‘Kin-tay’. In old shipping papers he discovered that Kunta Kinte had come from a remote village, Juffure in Gambia. So off he went to Africa. There he found the *groit* or oral historian of his tribe, who chanted from memory its story right down to the point of naming Kunta Kinte. The tribe laid their hands on his head and in that touch of love, Alex Haley found a kinship which for 200 years was broken.
3. In 1976 he published this, his story, ‘Roots: The Saga of an American Family’ which won a Pulitzer prize and was aired as a mini-series by ABC in 1977; and soon, thousands of people began to enquire at court houses and libraries to discover their family history, their genealogy, finding their roots.
4. we as Christians need, from time to time, to look back to our roots: that is one of the reasons that we celebrate the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis, looking back to the Lord’s death. Our Scripture reading this morning also looks back at our roots, the formation and growth of the church of Jesus Christ.
5. From that passage this morning, I want to look at some of the that resulted in that church, our roots, to grow. I do not plan to exhaust the truth from this passage; I used to do that but I found that I would exhaust myself in so doing, and, worse, exhaust the congregation! But let’s just look together, in the order they are found, at five things to which the members of this first church devoted themselves continually: doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer and praise.

- B. Devoting themselves to the Apostle's teaching or doctrine
1. When we hear words such as doctrine or theology
 - a. there is a mental alarm that sounds
 - b. a reaction, 'Let's just stick to the simple, gospel truths!'
 - c. but formal instruction in the truth, doctrine, is part and parcel of why God inspired men to write the Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching {doctrine}, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;" (NAS)
 2. note that this is the Apostle's teaching or doctrine
 - a. there is a body of truth in the Bible, in the part we call the New Testament, which form the basis of our faith
 - b. in some cases these may have formed a poem or hymn that believers could easily remember and recite to themselves, such as in Philippians 2 or Titus 3:11-14, "¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus; ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (NAS)
 3. we are in a better position than the Old Testament believers
 - a. the Scriptures they had were incomplete
 - b. they struggled, searching what the Spirit of Christ meant in what they read as 1 Peter 1:11 tells us
 - c. truly, the types, pictures, visions, and symbols remained a mystery, a mystery of which Paul speaks often ...
 - d. Colossians 1:26-27, "²⁶ *that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (NAS)*
 - e. therefore, the teaching of Scripture central to the ministry and growth of the church: do not neglect your Bible!

C. Devoting themselves to fellowship

1. first of all, fellowship is not just getting together as Christians to have a barbecue (as this coming Saturday at Jean & John's)
 - a. the root meaning is something 'common' or 'shared'
 - b. in the passage read, we see that sharing of goods, from those who had to those who had need was involved
 - c. it reflected what seems to be a feature of Mediterranean and near-Eastern culture: the attitude of the host who says 'my home is your home; my goods are for your use'
 - d. it involves sharing of one's table, of hospitality
 - e. it involves sharing of one's time, of friendship
2. so it includes participation in the lives of others
 - a. Paul appreciated the Philippians "... participation in the gospel from the first day until now." (1:5 NAS)
– fellowship was practical; they contributed to meet Paul's needs and so became part of Paul's work
 - b. this is part of fulfilling the command to us to 'bear one another's burdens' (Galatians 6:2, NAS)
 - c. nowhere better exemplified than in the Apostle's desire, "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;" (Philippians 3:10 NAS)
3. the growth of the church is rooted in sharing in both the joys and the sorrows of one another

D. Let us consider very briefly the last three items

E. Devoting themselves to breaking of bread

1. now, both from an examination of this passage, and from the historical use of this phrase, I understand this phrase to refer to the Eucharist or Lord's Supper
 - a. so this was a church that took time regularly
 - (A) and actually, in informal settings, in people's homes
 - (B) to stop and remember Jesus' death
 - b. a remembrance which also looked forward 'till He comes'

2. this coming together is a time
 - a. for reflection
 - b. for self-examination
 - c. for confession and cleansing
 - d. roots leading the church growth

F. Devoting themselves to prayer

1. there are quite a number of words for prayer in both the Greek and the Hebrew, as indeed there are also in English
 - a. and each of these have a different flavour
 - b. some emphasize the needs that are being addressed
 - c. the word used here often included the idea of vows
 - (A) that is those promises made to God of service or gift
 - (B) either conditionally on God's blessing, or absolutely
 - d. and given the context in the passage
 - (A) I would sense that here this flavour is included
 - (B) a praying not simply for various needs, ours or others
 - (C) but a prayer of commitment to God, committing to service, committing to His will, committing to others
2. committed, intense prayer is a root to growth as Christians

G. Devoting themselves to praise

1. I find it no wonder therefore
 - a. that we find this people praising God
 - (A) for in of their lives before God and man
 - (B) they saw His working daily
 - b. flowing out of their learning of truth, their sharing one with another, their time spent in remembering Jesus, their time with God in prayer, praise was inevitable
2. vibrant worship of God is a root to growth, as individuals and as a church: may our life and words praise Him daily

H. Conclusion

1. as in a moment or two, we participate in the Lord's supper
 - a. let us reflect for a moment or two
 - b. on these roots of growth
 - c. of how the early church received instruction, shared, celebrated this remembrance meal, prayed and praised God

2. motivated by their love of the Saviour who died for us all

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica 1977 Book of the Year; Biography of Alex Haley on Amazon.com, Kerux illustrations #7214, 20672