

Grounded - Ephesians 2:19-22

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It's impressive that for 150 years, our church has been in this community. And for 147 years we've been right here, on this ground—701 Main Street. A lot has happened on this dirt. A lot of lives changed. Community events. Weddings and funerals. Worship—and communion. Fellowship and coffee.

Kelley Davis has been combing through our church archives, and we've found the information on this land. It used to be Wear Casady's land, one of our founding members. Cassady gave us this land. And right here, our church has been meeting since then. Before City State Bank and the old Hardware Store, we were in Downtown Norwalk. And here we've stayed.

Staying—that's not something people do much anymore.

I had the privilege last week of helping with an AMOS house meeting training for some neighborhood association leaders in North Des Moines. They're looking at the future of the Grubb Community YMCA and the park and land that used to be Dowling High School, trying to build some community relationships that can influence the city's plan for the place. And in that room, there were some people who had lived in their neighborhoods their whole lives, and some of their families had been there for generations. Talk about being grounded.

As they shared their hopes and dreams for their neighborhood, they talked about what it used to be, and how the city had abandoned their neighborhood. Businesses moved out. There used to be a theater, restaurants, a gas station on the corner, and Dowling High School in the center. All those businesses and institutions left. They feel ignored by the city. But those folks in the room—they're staying there for good. This is their home. They're grounded.

My first experience with being grounded was as a child. And it wasn't a good thing. Being *Grounded* meant you couldn't go out with friends, couldn't watch TV, play video games, or talk on the phone with friends (that's like Facetiming, kids, but without the video). Basically, you were stuck in your room, with nothing to do but stare at the wall. But sooner or later, the boredom took over, and you started drawing, or playing with long forgotten toys, listening to music, or just imagining. Being grounded forced you to do things you would not have done. To focus. To become creative.

Grounded.

That's the word every plane flying in the US on September 11th, 2001 received. Because of the terrorist attacks, all flights were grounded, many for days. And life came to a halt.

Flights were diverted to the closest airports that could handle the traffic. There are a lot of stories that have emerged from that period, but none have captured our attention like the story that emerged from the small, Canadian town of Gander in Newfoundland.

The town was only 10,000, but their airport, an old WW2 base, was recently upgraded so it could be used as a refueling stop for long international flights. That's why they got the call. 38 flights were coming Gander. 7,000 passengers from around the world, in grounded in Gander for a week. And it wasn't just the passengers who were grounded. The whole town grounded to a halt.

The story is told in the 2003 book "The Day the World Came to Town", and recently adapted into the 2017 award-winning Broadway musical "Come from Away." One report of the event writes, "When flyers stepped off of their planes, Gander's citizens met them with homemade bagged lunches. The town converted its schools and large buildings into temporary shelters, and when those lodgings filled up, citizens took strangers into their own homes. Medical personnel saw patients and filled prescriptions free of charge." Passengers were blown away by the over-the-top hospitality of Gander. In the midst of such great human evil and tragedy, the best of who we are sprung forth in Gander, a city filled with people grounded in love.

In our busy, transient, distracted society, it's hard to be grounded today. There is so much to do that pulls our attention away. We rarely stick around one place anymore. School, jobs pull up our roots, and we plant ourselves in new places, until we have to uproot again. We are always on the move, looking for something better. Something new. Permanence is temporary.

Yet in this moment of transience, there is—surprisingly—a growing interest in our roots. Ancestry sites, like Ancestry.com and 23&Me are more popular than ever. For a fee you can spit your DNA in a vial, and discover your long lost ancestors names and where they came from, identify your DNA haplogroups, and even discover the kind of Neanderthal you are. You can ground yourself in your history, even when you have no roots in the ground around you.

Of course, humans have always been on the move. This is nothing new. Studying our ancestors reveals that we've all come from immigrants, some who immigrated by choice and some who were uprooted by force, enslavement, famine, and disease.

We are always on the move, and it can be argued that everything around us is temporary--but in the midst of the moves, changes, and innovations, it may do us well to stop for a moment and ground ourselves where we are.

Maybe we should go to our rooms, old school style. Shut off the screens, silence the devices, be alone with our thoughts, and rediscover our roots. Where did we come from?

The Apostle Paul knows this need well. His world was changing quickly. The gospel was on the move. The church in Ephesus was new—the first Christians of any kind ever in that city. Some had been Jews, many a part of primitive, pagan religions. But now they were a part of Christ.

And so Paul grounds them in the tradition: You are no longer strangers or aliens, he tells them, no longer migrants or foreigners. You are citizens. You're part of a community. You're grounded in God's story of love. And in this story, you can find a home.

It may be a new home to you, but this isn't a new house. This is the household of God. It's been grounded for years, since Christ's apostles, yes. But long before that. Our ancestry traces all the back to the ancient Jewish Prophets.

God has been doing a “new thing” for sometime.

The irony of staying grounded in one place is that, even though you may not move, everything around you does. The community changes. Children grow up and move away. Businesses close and new ones arrive. Friends pass away. Churches—steeped in tradition, look different. And saints that were sitting in these pews when you arrived are now gone, and new faces have just walked in.

It's hard, staying grounded, watching everything change around you. But there's more happening here.

The Apostle lets us in on God's development plans. There's a new structure arriving in town, he announces. Right here, upon this 150 year old foundation of love, God is building something permanent—God is building a dwelling place for *God*. Right here! You—us—we are being built into a dwelling place of God.

The world may be moving, everything may be changing. But God is settling down. Right here--among us! God is building a dwelling place that God has called the Church, grounding God's self--among us! Think about that?

God's home, in Norwalk Christian Church—right here with you and I, and with all the communities of faith that are grounded in God's love.

No matter what brought you to this place, if you're new, or were born in this church, if your roots run deep or you're still at the surface—you are well-grounded. The history runs deep. The foundation is strong. This is God's dwelling place, and though we may come and go, God has made God's home right here.

And if we are to continue to be that dwelling place of God in this community—then all we have to do is remain grounded in love

When the winds of change blow strong, when challenges come our way, when new opportunity lands in our community, when needs arise—guess what, we know what to do. It's what we've been doing for 150 years.

This ground—it has a history. A lot has happened at this dirt. And there's a lot more in store. Because this is truly holy ground!

Not because we're 150 years old, or because we've got it all figured out—but because among us—even this day—God's love is shared and all can become citizens of God here, grounded in our true home.

You, people of God, are God's dwelling place! And this is truly holy ground.