

Sermon: How To Thrive In Times of Disruption
Sunday April 5, 2020

Hey guys! I'm Jeremy, the Group Life Pastor here at Cornerstone.

Can you believe this is our fourth online worship service? We're so grateful that we can still worship God together through this technology.

- We love all the interactions going on in the comments section. So keep that up.
- We also love all the sermon notes you're sending us too. Here's one that Alyssa sent us last week. Isn't that awesome? Great job! Keep those sermon notes coming!

Also quick shout-out to our small groups. Thank you for getting your groups online! We need community now more than ever so keep meeting to encourage and support each other. And just a reminder that Study Guides for all our sermons are now available on our webpage so please check out those resources.

Our small group met last Friday. Here's a screenshot of our group. We welcomed a new member. His name is Moji, he's the dog in the top left corner. Because it was his first small group meeting, we pulled out our small group covenant and reviewed it with him. He committed not to pee during our meetings so we let him join.

Anyway, I just want to start by saying, I really miss you guys. Like all of you, my life has been crazy over the past few weeks. I've been working from home, taking care of my kids, trying to figure out what to do. I've lost my rhythms, I'm concerned for family and friends and my introverted side is dying to have my own space again!

That's a little about me, how are you doing? Shout out in the comments and let us know how we can pray for you.

Last Fall, I was feeling tired and discouraged. I prayed that God would give me an image that I could hold on to. And a word that would sustain me. How many people know that God can still speak to us? God spoke to me and gave an image and a word.

I begin every day now by picturing that image in my mind. And then I remind myself of the words he gave me. That image and those words have held me up not only in that season but also in the season we're in now.

When I was praying last week about this message, I thought about different topics I could preach on.

- I thought about how we're all going through so much so maybe I could preach on grieving our losses.
- I thought about how we're all so overwhelmed so maybe I could preach on soul care.
- I thought about how we're all being tested so maybe I could preach on how God refines us in the fire.

Then I thought about different passages. And I was surprised to see how much the Bible says about COVID-19.

For example, Paul says in Philippians 2:

in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own supply of toilet paper but each of you to the supply of toilet paper of others as well.

Or Leviticus 25 that says:

If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves... Do not sell a 590 mL bottle of Purell on Kijiji for \$120 but fear the LORD your God.

And of course, we all remember Pilate's response when the crowd shouted for him to crucify Jesus:

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands... not quickly, but for a full 20 seconds while singing the Happy Birthday song twice.

I know what you're thinking. These passages would have been great ones to preach on! But they still didn't seem right.

So I continued to pray. And I kept hearing God say, preach on the word that I gave you last fall. Share that with the people. So that's what I'm going to do. I'm indebted to a message by Pastor Tim Keller on this and I hope this word encourages you as much as it encouraged me.

The image God gave me last fall was the image of roots. Not the Canadian clothing brand with the beaver. Not the house band on The Tonight Show. And not the miniseries with the Reading Rainbow guy.

I'm talking about the roots of a tree. This image comes from Jeremiah 17:5-8.

This is what the Lord says:

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.
6 That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes.
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.

7 "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.

8 They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit."

In this passage, Jeremiah is making this point:

Where you plant your roots will determine how you experience life.

It will determine how you cope during this crisis. It will determine how you recover from the aftermath. It will determine whether you thrive or fall apart.

He illustrates this point using two trees.

The first tree is planted in the desert. The NIV calls it a *bush*. In the original Hebrew, it means naked, ugly and stunted. Now in the Bible, the desert often refers to times of suffering and hardship. But that's not how Jeremiah is using it here.

Because Jeremiah says this tree will be empty and dry *not only* in times of adversity but *also* in times of prosperity.

they will not see prosperity when it comes... They will dwell in the parched places of the desert...
(v. 6)

Why is that? It's because trees in the desert are designed to survive, not to thrive. They're dependent on rain for their existence because desert soil is extremely dry and contains little to no moisture. That's why trees in the desert are entirely dependent on the weather – if it doesn't rain, they'll die.

Now the second tree is planted by the water. And Jeremiah says something surprising about this tree as well. This tree is designed to thrive, not just survive.

In fact, it can thrive not only when it rains but also when it doesn't.

*It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit. (v. 8)*

Why is that? It's because the soil near the water has lots of moisture. So it's not dependent on the rain. Even during a drought, it has a source that enables it to thrive.

- So for the tree planted in the desert, all the rain in the world still won't change it. It will still be naked, ugly and stunted.
- But for the tree planted by the water, no drought or famine can change it. Its leaves will still be green and its branches will still bear fruit.

I know what you're thinking right now - This isn't botany class –what do all these trees have to do with me? Let me tell you what this means.

These two trees represent two ways to live your life, two ways to plant your roots, two ways to place your hope.

The first way is to place your hope in something like your work, your money, your health, your family. But here's the problem with that. Like the soil in the desert, you'll be dependent on having good circumstances. And when you don't get it, you'll be crushed.

Not only that, but even when good things happen, they still won't change who you are. On the outside, you might have success and status, but on the inside you'll still be broken and empty.

But there is another way. The other way is to place your hope in God. To recognize that

- You weren't put on earth to live for your own comfort. You were put on earth to trust God and reflect his character.
- You're called to love God and to love others.
- You're called to be generous, kind and hopeful.

And when the heat is on, when the rain doesn't come, when you're self-isolating at home, when your family is driving you crazy, when you're overwhelmed with stress, when you can't see your friends, when you can't go out to eat, when businesses shut down, when your job is at risk, when the stock market tanks, when a loved one gets sick, when you're not sure what to do...

If you're planted by the water, you'll be okay. Your leaves will still be green. Because your source isn't in the rain, it's in the river. You're not depending on circumstances, you're depending on God.

Where you plant your roots will determine how you experience life. It will determine how you cope during this COVID-19 crisis.

Why is this important? Well, what's the purpose of roots? Roots do two important things.

First, **roots anchor you so you won't blow away.**

A few years ago, a man appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show who had survived a massive hurricane. When he was asked how he survived, he simply said, *I held on to something that wouldn't move and I never let go.*

We live in a turbulent time. Schools are suspended, hospitals are struggling, businesses are shut down, jobs have been lost, the economy appears headed towards a recession.

Question: Where are you placing your hope? Are you placing it in something that can be taken away? Or are you placing it in Someone who is from everlasting to everlasting?

In the psalms, God is described as a rock, a refuge, a fortress, a strong tower. In other words, he's the one we turn to when things are uncertain. He's the one who's still standing, when everything's falling apart. When your roots are anchored in God, you won't be blown away by the storm.

The second thing roots do is they give you nutrients to thrive.

You and I are called

- to be conformed to the image of Christ,
- to become more like Jesus in his character.
- to join him in his mission of love to restore this broken and fallen world.

And oh how the world needs us to be the hands and feet of Jesus!

The Bible uses agricultural images to describe this. Paul describes how God's people are to bear the fruit of godly character. John describes how God prunes his people so they can be more fruitful in their service to him.

How do we bear this fruit? We can't do it on our own. We need the life of Jesus flowing through ours. We need his love shaping how we love others.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15:4)

Roots give you nutrients to thrive - to love God and to love others well.

So how can you be like that tree planted by the water? This was the question I asked God last Fall. And this is the word he gave me, this is the word that's been holding me up, this is the word I sense he wants you to hear:

Plant your roots deeper in me. (Someone right that in the comments.)

For some of you, you've put your trust in things other than God. You need to be replanted. Your roots need to be pulled up so that they can be planted in God.

This is what the Bible calls repentance. Repentance isn't feeling sorry about something.

- It's recognizing that the soil you're planted in won't anchor you in the storm. It won't give you the nutrients you need.
- It's turning away from your old life and confessing your sin so that you can turn to God and receive his life and forgiveness through Jesus.

For some of you, you're already planted by the water. But now more than ever, you need to come closer to that water, you need to plant your roots deeper in Jesus.

Paul is thinking this very thing when he says this to the Ephesians.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19)

I'm going to ask you to close your eyes for a moment as you listen to these words.

What would it look like for you to be rooted and established in God's love, in the days, weeks and months ahead? What would that look like for the church?

To be that tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
You do not fear when heat comes;
your leaves are always green.

You have no worries in a year of drought
and you never fail to bear fruit.”

You can open your eyes now.

Do you realize though that we weren't always that tree? At one point, we were all that bush in the desert. We needed water but couldn't get it. It was only because the One who was close to the water, gave it up to become a bush in the desert that we can now be planted by the water.

How do you thrive in times of disruption?

Plant your roots deeper in Jesus.

- Fix your eyes on him,
- Place your faith in him
- and Jesus himself promises that streams of living water will flow from within you.

Take care church and God bless you!