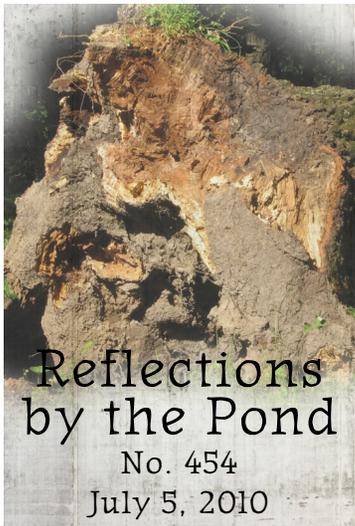


Roots

IT HAS BEEN A WET SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER IN THESE PARTS. Many inches of rain have fallen, until the rivers and streams are now cresting and flowing into nearby fields. Dams and spillways have been breached, rivers have forgot their boundaries, and widening creeks have flooded corn and bean fields.



Reflections
by the Pond

No. 454

July 5, 2010



Because of the fortunate lay of our land, except for some inconvenient trickles through the foundation wall we have been spared the worst of the flooding. Nevertheless, our ground has been utterly saturated for weeks. Rather than a firm foundation beneath the wheels of tractor and mower, it has been a soft, gooey mud soup. Though the grass may have occasionally dried sufficiently to be mowed, the mushy soil beneath reduced mowing to a slippery, bumper cars slapstick. Lose one's concentration for a moment, or one's deft hand on the stick, and suddenly one is sliding sideways down the hill and into the pond.

So it was not surprising to discover one morning that one of the oaks had lost its footing and collapsed to terra firma. In these parts, some of the oaks grow in clusters of two or three and, not surprisingly, the limited measure of nutrients in the soil means that the health of one or more of the trees may be less than robust. A few days later I worked up the fallen tree and added the logs to the woodpile. Then, a few days after that, a second tree from the same group decided it was time to go from the vertical to the horizontal.

Both of these oak trees shared one common characteristic: neither had any roots. Their sinuous connection to the surrounding soil had long since rotted away, so that at their base—now upended and exposed—was just a clump of thicker, rotting growth,

utterly insufficient to sustain their height and weight. They both had long ago lost their anchor to the soil.

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."

Matthew 13:3-6

We all begin as babies—both physically and spiritually. But while we all inevitably grow up physically, not all of us grow up spiritually. The transition from the bottle or breast to baby food, then on to breads and vegetables and meats is pretty much taken for granted. We pass through these developmental stages as a natural course and no one finds our progress remarkable; no one stands up and loudly celebrates our move from one to the next—except, of course, our doting parents and kin.

Our passage through the stages of *spiritual* maturity, however, are not so readily assumed or taken for granted. This transition

from babe to mature adult does not happen without some effort, time, and sense of purpose. It does not happen accidentally. Even a child born and weaned in the wild would as a natural course move from milk to solid food, but the same cannot be said for the spiritual babe.

I have never met an adult whose diet consisted entirely of milk from a nipple, or baby food spooned from tiny Gerber jars. But I have met a rather large number of adults whose spiritual diet consisted entirely of endless repetitions of religious pabulum—people whose roots are so shallow that they cannot bear the blinding light of the word, much less the siren song of the world's system. Under the light of the first, they turn away, either with disinterest or a rejection of its discomfiting illumination. Under the enticements of the second, they succumb and are ultimately led away from the light, for of the two, it is the easier path.

Real babies are cute and charming. *Adult* babies are repellent.

There is no special trick to raising spiritual children. Leave them alone and they will remain children on their own. The harder job is raising spiritual adults, and the hardest part of becoming a spiritual adult is the starting, for it takes a change of heart. As one does not become a Christian just by attending church, the Christian does not deepen his roots, and thereby grow up in the Lord, by ticking off

items on a spiritual Do List: “Today I will read my Bible for ten minutes, pray for five, attend a prayer meeting at seven o’clock.” As vital as these are, without the change of heart, they are little more than busywork.

This change of heart has a heavenly source. A believer’s roots are heavenly, not earthly.

So we begin the process of putting down deep and lasting roots on our knees. It is a form of worship, acknowledging the preeminence and worth-ship of God while confessing our own bankrupt estate. Just as we came to Christ initially by admitting our need for Him, we come repeatedly declaring our desire for *more* of Him to be instilled in the rootless shell of our earthly life.

Spiritual adults tread lightly upon this earth, for they are always reaching higher. That desire, that yearning, begins before the throne, asking the God who once and for all changed our permanent address, to change us once again: to turn our heart away from its love of earthly life to a love—a passion—for Him.

[Thus says the Lord,]

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord
And whose trust is the Lord.
For he will be like a tree planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of drought
Nor cease to yield fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7-8

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