

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

Clinging to Christ

To say the least, the old photograph you see on this page falls into the “Don’t Try This At Home” category, but I have always enjoyed looking at it. Taken almost 100 years ago, most likely it depicts one of my father’s elder brothers in their east Tennessee home town.

What was he thinking?

Dangerous, to be sure, and I’ll bet my grandparents would have been none too happy to see him pulling such a risky stunt — but still the photo makes me smile. Seemingly oblivious to the danger of high voltage and high altitude, my uncle’s facial expression is calm, even stoic; and his feet are at right angles to his legs, as if he were standing on the ground. It would have been impossible for him to hold such a pose for long.

He was literally “hanging on” for dear life, and the weight of his own body was pulling him down. It was as if he were having a battle with himself! What kept him safe for the few moments he posed for the picture was the sheer strength of his grip and nothing more. What a foolish prank, never to be repeated.

Planted in the Lord

As I have studied the photo through the years, I have seen a simple lesson emerge from my uncle’s foolishness:

Do we sometimes just “hang on” throughout life, relying on our own grip, our own strength, to keep us safe? Do we think that is what God expects of us?

Faith offers a better, safer and more “grounded” alternative: We are not to “hang on” but be “planted” in the Lord, “rooted” in his strength. When instead of merely hanging on through life’s challenges we dig more deeply into the Lord, we prosper spiritually, we hold



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firm through life’s storms, and we build a foundation on solid truth and not on attractive but flimsy philosophies.

When we are rooted in God, we truly come alive and prosper; his grace is our strength:

“Happy indeed is the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked; nor lingers in the way of sinners nor sits in the company of scorners, but whose delight is the law of the Lord and who ponders his law day and night. He is like a tree that is planted beside the flowing waters, that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never fade; and all that he does shall prosper.” (Ps 1:1–3)

“The just will flourish like the palm tree and grow like a Lebanon cedar. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God, still bearing fruit when they are old, still full of sap, still green ...” (Ps 92:13–15)

“... consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you.” (see Rom 11:16–18)

Rooted in God

When we are rooted in God, we can hold firm and weather life’s storms:

“Thus says the Lord ... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.” (see Jer 16:5–8)

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise



man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.” (see Mt 7:24–25)

When we are rooted in God, our foundation is built on firm truth and not on flimsy philosophies:

“And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds he has

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You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain’s Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.

now reconciled in his fleshly body through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him, provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven ...” (Col 1:21–23)

“I say this so that no one may deceive you by specious arguments ... So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.” (Col 2:4–8)

If we are to cling to anything, we are to cling to Christ.

Clinging to him is nothing like “hanging on,” for he is shelter and safety, hope and strength, food and drink, root and foundation, wisdom and life. After all, his cross — our tree of life — was firmly and deeply planted in the ground.