

“God Gives the Growth”

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[Psalm 84 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-11](#)

Today, we conclude what has turned into a small series of sermons. Two weeks ago today, we talked about how this church is built on the rock of Jesus Christ. We read the wonderful parable from Jesus about the wise person building their house on the rock, and discussed how we are all built on the most solid foundation there can be, Jesus Christ. Last week, we spoke about the Reformation – how we come from a tradition of being reformed and always reforming, according to the Word of God. Again, we spoke of our rootedness, in scripture, faith, grace, Christ, and all for the glory of God. We spoke also about the saints of the past, as we commemorated All Saints Sunday, lifting up the witness of those who came before us, on whose shoulders we stand. This speaks of our heritage, and how we go forward with the ministry of the church as handed down to us by our forebears. Today, our focus is drawn to the magnificent building in which we gather to worship, and again, our thoughts turned toward our foundation. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the construction of this building, and what a blessing this building is! For 150 years, the community has gathered here to worship, learn, celebrate new life and mourn deaths, study, plan, and fellowship. Our church building has long been a testament to the faith, foresight, and perseverance of Presbyterians. A news article in June 1867 reads: “An effort is being made by the Presbyterians in this city to build them a new church. They surely need a splendid one and their large and fine congregation would grace such an edifice as well as any in our city... [W]e hope to soon see a spire from their contemplated church pointing gracefully toward heaven.” A later article, after construction began, reads: “It is already plain to be seen that this building will be a great ornament to our city.” Yet another article proclaims: “Work on the new Presbyterian church is going rapidly...Surely none of our citizens can view this magnificent structure without feeling genuine emotions of pride.”

We have such pride today, 150 years later. Our pride is in the beautiful surroundings in which we are blessed to gather. Our pride is in the loving care with which generations have stewarded this place. Our pride is in the heritage we inherit of those who sacrificed much to ensure that a building would be here for these 150 years. And our pride is in our role in the Forward 150 capital campaign which set the stage for the next 150 years.

And yet, we know that all of this is based in the faithfulness of our God. God chooses to work through us, but our reading today from 1 Corinthians reminds us that it is God who makes it all happen. Paul writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

Each of us plays a role in the life and ministry of this congregation. As our stewardship theme reminds us, we individually are Making a Difference, we as the church are Making a Difference, but primarily God is Making a Difference, through us. Paul planted, and Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. Paul and Apollos were each necessary, but neither could do anything apart from God.

Such is the case in this church – and every church. Each of us has a role in properly stewarding our time, talent, and treasure, but it is God who will use what we offer. Though the logistics did not work out for us to do so, in our stewardship meetings, we discussed having everyone bring forward their commitment cards and placing them on the altar, as a physical representation of how we bring these gifts to God for God to use. Though we are not doing so physically, the intention remains the same – we present what we have, which is a gift from God to begin with, to be used by God for ministry in this place and beyond. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. It is an important reminder for us all.

The same is true for this building. People of faith came together in this place to commit themselves to building a wonderful place in which to worship, learn, grieve and celebrate together. They planted, and our spiritual ancestors watered – and we continue to water – trusting God to give the growth.

Paul speaks of this in metaphorical terms, which, in this case, I think we can also take literally: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”

150 years ago, like skilled master builders, our forebears laid the foundation of this place of worship. They committed the time, talent, and treasure necessary to make a place for themselves and generations afterward to gather, and we are grateful, but it didn’t end with them. Paul says that each of us is a builder, who must choose with care how to build on that foundation, and then he reminds us that the foundation is really Jesus Christ. We return to the scripture from two weeks ago – the wise one builds upon the rock of Christ.

I often begin worship services by quoting from Psalm 122:1: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” *The Message* paraphrase has that verse as “When they said, ‘Let’s go to the house of God,’ my heart leaped for joy.” Does your heart leap for joy upon coming to this place of worship? I hope so. I hope that at least some of the time, in the midst of the chaotic days of our lives, our hearts leap for joy when coming to worship. The Psalmist reminds us that a day in the house of the Lord is better than a thousand elsewhere. All that we are sings out for joy to the living God. While we can - and should – worship God in any setting, doing so in the beauty and majesty of this building can enhance our sense of wonder and awe at the greatness of God. We are indeed blessed to be able to gather here, continuing to build on the foundation begun in Jesus Christ. May we each be faithful builders of the kingdom of God.

There is a prayer often used at the dedication of a church building. It is appropriate to use it today, as well, as we commemorate the first 150 years of this building. Please pray with me:

Eternal God, high and holy, no building can contain your glory. May this space be used as a gathering place for people of goodwill. When we worship, let us worship gladly; when we study, let us learn your truth. May every meeting held here meet with your approval, so that this building may stand as a sign of your Spirit at work in the world, and as a witness to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.