September 11, 2016   
Colossians 2:6-7   
Growing

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Colossians 2:6-7 The Inclusive Bible

Since you have received Christ Jesus, live your whole life in our Savior. Send your roots deep and grow strong in Christ—firmly established in the faith you’ve been taught, and full of thanksgiving.

We have been winding our way through rooted, growing, reaching which we were reminded last week was the vision or logo when they dedicated Glory Be Hall in February 2011. Our music minister in 2011 was Chelsea Stern and she said that as she thought about sitting in Glory Be Hall and seeing the lovely trees, the theme of rooted, growing, reaching just came to her. These few weeks we are also going to sing the hymn that John Thornburg wrote for that Glory Be Hall dedication worship. I love the words that he wrote so much, so maybe after a few weeks of singing them they will be etched on our hearts and our minds. Last week we talked about being rooted in God’s inclusive love, and this week we talk about seeking to learn and grow uniting knowledge, faith and prayer until they overflow.

Mike Kilpatrick was on the Building Committee when Glory Be Hall was built and in my investigating I found something that he wrote about rooted, growing, reaching. About growing Mike wrote, “Our growth takes place above our roots, building upon their strength, adding branches, increasing canopy, strengthening and expanding structure that assures continuation. This growth allows us to reveal our personality, our genes, and identifies who we are. As branching is added along the way it in turn creates even more points of growth, our reach, if you will.”

I love our scripture that talks about living our lives in Christ Jesus our Savior. Our roots are deep so we can grow strong in Christ. We grow in Christ and have God centered transformation when we read our Bible, when we pray, and when we are involved in hands on mission. When we read our sacred texts, we find story after story of people who mess up and are able to heal and find that God’s presence has always been with them. When we pray, we are able to be still and listen to God. When we are involved in hands on mission, we are able to see our purpose.

We get so hung up on doing everything perfectly. If we can’t read an entire book of the Bible every night, we don’t even try. If we can’t spend 20 minutes in silent prayer, then we give up. If we can’t volunteer every week, then we don’t ever volunteer. I wish we would remember that God uses imperfect people. We are imperfect people. A book that I really enjoyed recently was called Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray, and Still Loving My Neighbor by Jana Riess. She tries 12 different spiritual practices on this quest to become more saintly. She begins thinking how hard can this be? And she quickly realizes that she is failing not at just some of the practices, but at every single one. It is this wonderful book about the reality of spiritual failure on this quest for spiritual perfection.

Do you remember A.J. Jacobs book, The Year of Living Biblically, where he tried to follow every single rule in the Bible as literally as possible? There were many rules and for him the hardest to follow was not to gossip. I am reminded of the first Methodist, John Wesley’s mom, Susanna. Susanna had 19 children, 9 of whom died as infants. She spent one hour alone with each of her children each week. In the going and driving and hurrying and we have to leave now, can you imagine an hour each week one on one talking and sharing about what is on your heart?

Last Sunday after 9 am worship I was visiting with some folks outside after worship and Stephen Houpt was playing the postlude with his steel guitar. It sounded so cool. And someone who was walking down the street, doubled back, and came close to the church to listen. He said, “What is that?” So, I greeted him and he said, “I need to listen to that music,” so I kept talking about Stephen, and he said, “Can I listen to that music?” And I realized, I needed to be quiet. He was hearing God in the music and my talking was drowning out God. God helps me in the quiet. When I tune out the to-do lists and the negative thoughts, I rest in God’s loving presence.

Last week we had one of our sanctuary AC units replaced. According to Russell Faulhaber the unit we replaced was installed in the mid 1980s replacing the original commercial water cooled units and cooling tower. For 25 years Russell’s dad came every Saturday in the summer to service that original water cooled unit and cooling tower, so when those new units came in the mid 1980s, Russell’s dad would still come every Saturday to check on them. Russell said, “My dad was a Methodist so he still came to check every week, just in case.” The unit that was replaced was donated by a charter member of the church, Grady Daniels and it has now gone to be with Jesus. The AC repairmen couldn’t believe how old it was. I think it worked for so long because Russell’s dad came to check on it every Saturday.

It makes me think of Freon, if the AC unit is filled to the brim with Freon then it is able to cool the space as it is designed. It is able to work to its potential. I think that is a good metaphor for us. God loves us, God is always with us, and when we are filled to the brim with God’s own strength, power, and presence, then we are able to live up to our potential. We are able to work and live as we should.

Then we are generous, and we give sacrificially. We don’t give what is left over, we give God our first fruits and our best. Do you know that fifty years ago in the Mennonite church you could audit someone’s financial books if you felt like they weren’t giving 10% of their income to the church? Can you imagine if you hear someone from Greenland Hills gossiping, and you ask to audit their financial records to verify that they are giving 10% of their salary to the church?

When we live our whole lives in Christ, we are prayerful, we pray without ceasing. We study the Bible to know what it says and to see how over and over again God uses people who have messed up to bring about good in the world.

We seek God’s direction in our life and want to live as Jesus would have us live, loving those who Jesus loves. We live a life of intention and commitment where our habits are aligned with Jesus. We worship as a way to stop and give praise and glory to God.

Jesus invites us to bring our broken selves to him to find wholeness and healing because our lives are supposed to reveal God’s goodness. I want to be a loving parent, I want to show my kids love and I hope that most days I do. God is love and God shows it through the gift of creation, through the gift of life that we have, through the gift of peace when we are having a difficult time. God works through people that show love with a shoulder to cry on or a casserole, a phone call or a text. We show love to God by having a relationship with God, talking to God and worshipping God.

Today is the day when we remember that 15 years have passed since the terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the jet downed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

We remember the way that people were drawn to church that day and in the days that passed. They wanted to be with a faith community that would pray, sing, hear scripture, and reach out to God.[[1]](#footnote-2) We all saw how God was reaching out “to families who were grieving the loss of loved ones or who were searching for a loved one; to persons who were aiding in the relief and recovery efforts; to people caring for the injured – to all of us. God was reaching out to all of God's children. Our God was weeping at each person's loss.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

God weeps when we weep. God hurts when we hurt. In the midst of that hurt and pain we hoped and worked together to create a new future with God for the world. We do that every day in the daily acts of goodness, peace, and love that we share with one another when we are drawn into the presence of God. God is reaching out to us today and every day and that is the hope we live by. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. Taken from letter to clergy from Bishop Michael McKee, emailed on Friday, September 9, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Taken from letter to clergy from Bishop Michael McKee, emailed on Friday, September 9, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)