



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

October 11, 2015

“Growing”

(Ephesians 4:13-15)

Rev. David K. Groth

“ . . . and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:13-15).

COLLECT: Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace always precedes and follows us, help us to forsake all trust in earthly gain and to find in You our heavenly treasure; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever **Amen**

If your household was like mine there was a place where, as a child growing up, your height was regularly recorded. Often on our birthdays, mom or dad would take the ruler and put it on top of our heads and mark on the door frame how high we stood. Something happened to me in high school where I just sort of took off, beyond what was reasonably expected. Mom said it probably had something to do with the diet pills she was taking while pregnant with me before she knew she was pregnant. My brothers just call me “the Freak.” I remind them to be respectful. “It’s Rev. Freak.”

In any event, the door frame was the measure. Sometimes the spaces between the hash marks were thin. Sometimes they were wide. But the door frame was the measure.

All of us in the Christian faith have Christ as the measure by which we trace our growth. That’s the point of St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, imploring us to grow in our faith, to become mature in the faith, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Will you please grow up, begs Paul. If your body stops growing at the age of ten, it’s a real problem. If your Christian faith and life stop growing at ten or thirty or sixty, that too is a real problem. If you look at the mark on the door this year and it’s at the same place as last, something is not happening that should be happening.

The first word under the Ignited logo is “teaching.” We covered that last week. The second word under the logo is “growing.” Growing in the faith is what we are to be about. What we are asking of you in this Ignited emphasis is to grow. Through the reception of God’s Word and sacrament, allow your faith to grow. Grow in your prayer

life as you seek his will. Grow in the study of God's Word. Grow in your acts of mercy and witness. Grow in your giving. Don't stall out. Don't coast. Keep pushing forward.

There comes a time when we physically stop growing, in terms of height. So maybe the door frame is not the best illustration. Maybe thinking about a tree would be better. When you take down a tree you can count and study the rings, each representing a single growing season. Sometimes the rings are wide meaning the tree grew well. Sometimes they're thin, meaning the tree was stressed by something, like a drought. Nevertheless, a tree is always growing, isn't it? Even in its old age it adds yet another ring. It never shrinks back it on itself. Would that as Christians, we grew like the tree in faith and life! Even in the heat and the drought, add another ring .

In the same way, we should keep growing in our stewardship. We should keep moving upward on that generosity ladder. Don't let your generosity grow stagnant and flat. That is, some watch their income grow over the years, while their giving remains flat. Or maybe the giving has grown dollar wise but the percentage remains flat: it was three percent five years ago and is still at three percent today. Or maybe people tithe off of their Social Security income while their savings continues to grow and grow untapped for the kingdom of God. I challenge you wherever you are at on the ladder to keep growing in generosity. (Gail and I are challenging ourselves to do the same.) Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "As you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge . . . see that you also excel in this grace of giving" (2 Cor. 8:7).

In our text for today, Paul says we don't want to be like children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. We need to grow and seek to attain the full measure of the stature of Christ. Reading this text, even two thousand years later you can sense Paul is a little frustrated with the Corinthian Christians. They are not where they should be. Would Paul be frustrated with you?

You can certainly hear the frustration in Hebrews

chapter 5: “By this time, you ought to be teachers. As it is, however, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s Word all over again. You still need milk, and not solid food!” (Heb. 5:12-14). Did you notice the direction that faith has, the progression it takes? It’s supposed to go from learning to teaching, from receiving to giving, from being witnessed to . . . to being evangelists. But some never seem to progress. CS Lewis wrote, “It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And, you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched . . . or go bad.”

Right before the sermon you saw the video of Mark and Tracey Williams. What a difference the Gospel has made in their lives. Such rapid growth and the Lord used this church to make that difference! All it took was someone to point them here, to invite them here. The Holy Spirit did the rest. When’s the last time you’ve invited someone to your church? When’s the last time you’ve taken risks for the sake of Christ?

In the parable of the talents, that last servant took no risks. Instead of investing the money entrusted to him as the other servants had done, he went out and buried it because he had this strong aversion to risk. Remember how that turned out for him? When the master returned he treats that third servant as harshly as anyone in scripture. “You wicked and lazy servant” the master says to him. “You should at least have invested my money with the bankers, so I could have it back with a little interest.” And then to his other servants, “Cast him out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Wow! Why so angry?

Mark Williams emailed me some questions about that parable, and also made an observation. “If I had been judged sixteen months ago, I believe like the third servant I would have been in real trouble. I didn’t know any better. I was in real darkness. I am so grateful Good Shepherd reached out to us and did not judge us as failures.”

Mark and Tracey keep bees for a hobby. By the way, they have plans to help start an after school beekeeping club for the children in our school. Tracey also volunteers weekly as a tutor in our school. Mark has also made it his personal goal to invite at least one person a week to our church. I know that puts me to shame it probably does you too. He gives his neighbors a bottle of honey and information about our services and invites them to come. He knows the difference the Gospel has made in his own life, and wants the same to happen for others.

Mark and Tracey in so little time have made that progression in the faith, from learning to teaching, from receiving to giving, from being witnessed to . . . to being evangelists. That's the progression we all need to be making. "We are in every way, Paul writes, "to grow up into him who is the head, into Christ."

Last week I addressed the goals we have under the word "teaching." Today I want to do the same for the goals we have under "growing". One of the lessons we learn as children is the value of taking care of that which is ours. It's usually less expensive to maintain and repair than it is to replace. So as mature Christians we also want to take good care of the facilities. There are cracks growing in the parking lot. We need to address those again. There is duct tape holding together some of the seams in the carpet. Sooner or later, the sanctuary roof is going to require attention. And with an energy audit we may be able to uncover additional savings. With the finances as they are, we would not be able to do these things.

We also want to equip the sanctuary and the youth room with technology to assist with the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Some people learn best visually. Remember the God's Pie video we showed two weeks ago? I could try to preach that same message, but putting it in visual format was so much more powerful, wasn't it? So one of the goals of Ignited is to equip this sanctuary with the technology to do more things like that. Moving all the seats

around and borrowing Kathy Wagner's sister's projector is not a long term answer.

Another goal of ignited is to eliminate our debt. Some say a church should always have some debt or else it's not challenging itself. Maybe so. But our debt is big enough and oppressive enough that it prevents us from taking on any new challenges. Most of us don't tolerate unnecessary debt at home, nor should we tolerate it at God's house! We need to take care of it, and we can if we all pull hard together.

We also want to reach out to families. An idea that kept coming up at the Parish Planning Sessions was the idea of a family night at Good Shepherd. Many parents today feel guilty about not spending more quality time with their kids. The demands of work and school and athletics are crowding out family time. Well, let's do something to reverse the trend, while also integrating the Gospel. Here's the plan. Begin with a meal including multi-generational members of the family at the table. Continue with something like an art project to work on, again as a family. Conclude with a brief devotion and prayers. Make it low cost, fun, family centered, fast moving. Again, it's doing whatever we can to help the family be a family, but also to help the family grow in relationship with God and his church.

So today is all about growing in the faith. How do we do that? Short answer? We don't. But God promises to grow our faith using his Word and Sacrament. It was enough to turn Saul (persecutor of Christians) into Paul (evangelist). It was enough to turn Luther (a monk trying to save his own skin) into Luther (reformer of the church). It was enough to turn you and me from children of the world to God's children. It was enough to raise Lazarus from the dead and it will be enough to raise us. And it is enough to grow our faith today. God's Word is sufficient.

That's the promise of God. Like rain and snow come down from heaven and make the earth bud and flourish, making it fertile and productive, so is God's Word . . . it achieves the growth and maturity in Christ that we so desperately need (Is. 55:10).

That's how God builds another ring in our tree, in good weather and bad, through his Word and Sacrament. Amen.

