

September 19, 2010  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Colossians 3:1-17

### A Church that is Growing

As Paul begins his letter to the church of Jesus Christ that is in Colossae he writes;

*In our prayers for you we always thank God ... for we have 'heard' of your faith... how you have 'heard' the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus and how that Good News is bearing fruit and growing – not just in the world but in you yourselves. (Col 1:3-6 my paraphrase)*

'...for we have heard of your faith' – It seems to me that Paul has little if any firsthand experience with this community of faith. What he knows about them has come to him from others.

Hummm... I wonder what others say about the community of faith that calls itself Echo Hill?

- Wow! They've got a great building out there.
- I hear the Pastor loves to kayak.
- What about that parking lot?

We are talking about our vision in this series of sermons – we are looking at each of the core beliefs that will shape us as a community. Our vision and core beliefs will put an end to the

‘wondering about’ what others will say because it will help us determine what people will say about this community.

I want to be clear about this. Our vision – these core beliefs – is not to be self serving – it is instead for us to be clear in our witness to Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ who is at the center of our faith. Jesus Christ who is at the center of our lives. Jesus Christ who is our all and all.

What our vision does is give us a blueprint for building the kind of community that God is calling us to in Jesus Christ. And this is what we want people to say – others to hear about us.

Echo Hill? – is a *welcoming* church – they believed they are called to welcome all people because God in Jesus welcomes all people.

Echo Hill? – well their folks are *growing* – growing in their love and knowledge of Jesus Christ – growing in their love of others. They believe that God calls them to grow in Jesus Christ.

Echo Hill? – they are a *caring* community – they care about one another – but what is amazing is the way they care about people who aren’t even a part of that community. They are helping out coaching at the soccer fields, serving meals at the meal center, and helping to rebuild homes that were flooded.

Echo Hill? – they are *generous*. You know they have a lot of their own needs – it’s a growing church – but over and over again we hear about their generosity to others. Marion Cares, Camp

Wyoming, Meet and Eat, Neighborhood Meals, Family Promise. They say that they are generous because God in Jesus Christ is extremely generous.

This is what we want people to hear – this is what we want people to say. For this to happen though – we have to do more than say it on a piece of paper – we have to become it – it has to become a part of us – it has to become habitual – we will be welcoming, growing, caring and generous without even thinking about those things.

This morning we are going to take a look at ‘growing’.

And we are going to start by being reminded that God in Jesus Christ calls us to grow. – In fact this is the metaphor for Christian Life.

- John writes about Jesus – that he is the vine and we are the branches – branches that are to grow and bear fruit. And how if we aren’t bearing fruit we need a good pruning.
  
- Jesus himself uses the parable of the sower (seeds upon the path, seeds that fall among the rocks, seeds that have weeds grow up among them, and seeds that find themselves in the good soil – as a metaphor to understand why some people’s faith grows and blooms – while others shrivel and dies.

- Jesus sends out his disciples to share with others the Good News of God's reconciling and redeeming work - telling those disciples that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.
- Even the eternal life – the resurrection life – is described by Paul as the transformation that takes place as a seed falls to the ground – dying to itself – and as it dies to its former self – what comes from the seed – the wheat – the corn – the flower – the bush – the tree - is much more glorious.

As Paul writes to the Colossians – he says that he has heard – that they have run face first into Jesus – through the Gospel – the Good News – and that they are bearing fruit.

For Paul the transformation that is represented in these images of seeds growing – fruit being borne – is rooted in baptism – what is represented in that sacrament.

This dying to sin – this being reconciled to God – our sins forgiven - you see – freed to become a new creation – because of Christ – his death – his resurrection.

Dying with Christ in our baptism, Paul writes, we are raised with Christ – something new.

Paul says that our encounter with Christ changes everything – we are to put to death – we are to get rid off – we are to strip off the old self – and we are to put on the new self.

Paul's list of transformative realities includes dying to – sexual sin, greed (idolatry), anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language, lying. It also includes being born to – becoming – compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, forgiving, loving.

We are called – as people – as churches – who claim to have encountered the living God in Jesus Christ – to be growing.

We are a community called to grow – grow in our faith – individual and together – we are to grow in learning and in serving. We are to grow numerically – with no apologies – because that is what God has called the church to.

My question is how have we grown. What is the fruit being born in our lives – personally – and together. Let's just take a minute to think about that. I want you to take your Connection Card and I want you to write on it one way that you have grown in your faith over this last year. I want you to be specific.

What have you learned about God, yourself – yourself as a child of God – that has changed you?

What have you done that has opened you to a new understanding about who God is and how we are to live in response to that?

How has something challenged you and made you rethink what you believe about God and what God would have you say or do?

How have you changed – have you grown?

This is what I would write – in the last year – as I have – with you all – faced all the challenges of moving to a new place and working to become a new community of faith – I have grown in my ability to trust God – God’s wisdom and knowledge – God’s providence – more than myself.

Let me suggest to us that there are two parts to our calling to be a community of faith that is growing.

The first part is that we must encounter the living God in Jesus Christ. – How?

***Regular Bible Study*** – maybe you are disciplined enough to do this at home – maybe you have a great resource to help. But most of us need a little help – I would encourage you to be a part of one of the many Bible Studies that take place each week. This morning there are two Bible Studies for adults – Truth Seekers and the Chronological. There are groups on Monday and Wednesday – and there are groups that meet throughout the area.

We had a woman from another church join us for our Wednesday Bible Study.

*A community that knows at the core of their being – that they are called to grow – will not make excuses – but will find ways – to make sure they are growing.*

**Daily Prayer** – Prayer is the relational language that aids us in coming close to God – it is our speaking – yes – but as importantly it is our listening. Guess what? On Sunday mornings this fall we are offering a series on prayer called – Conversations with God.

**Weekly Worship** – Worship is about forming us as God’s people. It is here that we practice being thankful, forgiving and giving people. It is here we learn to serve as we serve (in worship) our servant God.

We also grow as we *serve others*. Serve others here and out there. By putting our faith into practice we come face to face with the realities of what we believe about God and ourselves – and how we are to live in the light of that.

You want to grow – serve others by teaching a Sunday School class or Text Time students from Marion Cares. Start with one of the children’s classes. I guarantee you nobody grows more than the teacher.

You want to grow – open yourself to volunteering at a meal program, a volunteer shelter, go help Lois Rude at Helping Hands.

We have been called to be a community that is growing – bearing fruit – because we have encountered the living God in Jesus Christ – and because of that we cannot remain stagnate.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.