

Sermon: Growing Christ's Church Deep and Wide
Scripture: Colossians 2:1-7
(Micah 6:1-8, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

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Colossians 2:1-7 (New Revised Standard Version):

¹ For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. ² I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. ⁶ **As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**

Today is our Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday, the 139th Annual Meeting of this community of faith on the shores of Orchard Lake. We have received the teaching and examples of the faithful saints who have gone before us and now we are the ones who are carrying forward the life and ministries of Christian faith in this place and time. We hear the words of Scripture echo in our ears: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) "We proclaim Christ crucified...Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God...let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 31) And finally, the Apostle Paul, probably writing while imprisoned in Rome, exhorts the believers in the community of Colossae where others had carried his message of faith: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6-7)

Do you hear a recurring theme in these passages? In each one we are challenged to remember our call to live out our faith with joy and humility – to "walk humbly with our God" doing justice and kindness, to "boast in the Lord" remembering that all we are and have comes not from ourselves but from God, to "continue to live your lives in Christ Jesus, rooted and built up in the faith just as you were taught..." We are called to a lifelong journey of faithful discipleship as we carry on and carry forward the faith we have received from the parents and friends and fellow church members who have passed it on to us. The title of today's message is "Growing Christ's Church Deep and Wide". On this Sunday of our

congregational meeting we are going to remember and celebrate some of the things God has done in our midst in the year past. We have heard in the past few weeks the “State of the State” address from our new Governor, Rick Snyder, and the “State of the Union” address from President Obama highlighting things of significance both in our state and our nation. Today is a “State of the Congregation” address of sorts as we consider how we are continuing to live our lives rooted and built up in Christ Jesus. I have taken the title from the theme for this year’s Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study produced by the Mission Interpretation team of the General Assembly of our denomination. This is an excellent resource summarizing how God is at work in our country and around the world through believers in the Presbyterian church. Copies are still available and I encourage you to pick one up and be inspired with stories of others who are continuing to live their lives rooted and built up in Christ Jesus. So this morning we will reflect on how our beloved congregation is “Growing Christ’s Church Deep and Wide.”

Before moving on to reflect on the year past, I want to emphasize a very important principle at the heart of each of these scriptures I have quoted. We are challenged and exhorted to walk with our God and nurture lives rooted in faith in Christ Jesus, abounding with thanksgiving. Whatever happens here on our campus in the many wonderful ministries and activities which are offered day after day will only be of lasting meaning and significance because of our own commitment to and practice of Christian faith and discipleship when we are not here “at church”. We can plan wonderful programs and ministries, we can have fine staff and facilities, we can be very busy and very impressive for those who look at us from the outside, but if we are not living our own life of personal discipleship and stewardship of the Gospel we have received, whatever we do will have only passing value and significance. What happens as we gather here for worship, fellowship, education, and mission needs to be the outgrowth of lives of faith we live “24 / 7 / 365” as they say – all day long, every day, each day of the year! We can’t simply “turn on” faith for an hour or so on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights – it needs to be the heart of who we are and what we are about all the time. Then our worship and study and service and fellowship are the fruit of our faith in Christ shared with God and one another. We will experience a vibrancy in our worship and fellowship which would be missing otherwise. When we live to “glorify God and enjoy him forever” as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, we live all our moments wherever we may be as offerings of worship and service to the Lord. Then our life together as a faith community is the corporate expression of the personal faith commitment we continue to walk in and be rooted in each and every

day. Our Christian life and vitality is shared and enhanced in our times of being together when we approach our faith journey in this manner. Too often we leave “spiritual things” to our times of bible study or corporate worship or to the times when we “go to church” as we so often say. Well, we ARE the church and we live as the church when our lives are “rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith” wherever we go and in everything we do. Then we are “walking humbly with our God” and we will experience all the best God has in mind for those who love and serve God’s kingdom! Perhaps we should add personal reports of the things we have each done in our faith journey over the past year to the Annual Report for these are the truly important matters which allow us to be rooted and built up as disciple followers of the Lord Jesus who has given his life for us!

2010 has been a year filled with many blessings and challenges here at Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian. As we reflect on “Growing Christ’s Church Deep and Wide” we are grateful for God’s faithfulness to our faith community in the 139th year of its life and service in this place. The Campbell’s would be pleased to see what is happening in this place! Using our theme, let me suggest that growing Christ’s church deep has to do with living our lives and ministries personally and corporately in Worship and Education. This is where we are rooted and built up in the faith we have received in Jesus Christ. And growing Christ’s church deep has to do with living our lives and ministries personally and corporately in Fellowship and Mission. This is where we extend Christ’s love and presence to one another in our congregation and beyond our congregation to our communities and schools and neighborhoods and workplaces and region and world. In doing these things we continue to live out the faith passed down to us through the ages.

In growing Christ’s church deep, we have been blessed this year in our worship life together. Led by gifted staff and member servants using their skills for our benefit we enjoyed the “Living Last Supper” on Maundy Thursday, inspiring performances of Handel’s “Messiah” in December, and a wonderful musical presentation on Christmas eve entitled “Christmas Special Delivery”. We have been led in worship by skilled vocal and instrumental groups including the Joyful Noise youth bell choir! We seek to sustain and advance our worship life together so we are nurtured and nourished in our faith journey. If we continue with the analogy of being “rooted” in Christ, worship is the water necessary to keep those roots growing and vital. And we must seek that water regularly, here in one another’s company and each

and every day in our times of personal prayer and worship remembering Christ's presence in us and around us.

In the same way in our education ministries we have been blessed in the year 2010. If worship waters our roots in Christ, then education becomes the fertilizer that feeds and nourishes those roots for growth and development as we mature in the faith. Once again, led by faithful and skilled staff and member servants who plan and teach and lead in these ministries, we have seen an increase last year in participation from children through adult age ministries and programs. Sunday School and Akaloo continue to grow in numbers. There were more than 80 adults involved in classes or study or prayer groups this past fall which is more than in recent memory. Our youth ministry was analyzed and revitalized under Scott's leadership – Scott, who also completed his master degree studies in December: Congratulations!! – drawing in new adult leadership and new excitement among the participants. Once again, both individually and as a faith community, we need to be rooted in regular times of studying God's Word and sharing how that Word is shaping our views of the world and the practice of our faith commitments. This is the Word that is scattered on the ground in Jesus' Parable of the Sower, the Word meant to grow and bear fruit for God! We need to grow in the years ahead in our knowledge of that Word and our sharing of our faith journey with other believers in classes, studies, and small groups so we may encourage and challenge one another. From children to youth to adult we all need to consider how we are being shaped and formed spiritually as we continue to live and grow toward maturity in the faith we have received in Jesus Christ. That's what Paul labored and struggled to do in his day and we must labor and struggle to do the same in our day!

As we, with God's help, seek to grow Christ's church deep, we must also remember we are here primarily to spread the faith we have received to the lives of others who God wishes to call to faith and life in Jesus Christ. We exist not to serve our own needs but to serve others in Jesus' name just as he came not to be served but to serve and give his life for others. So we also pray God will grow Christ's church wide through ministries of Fellowship and Mission. To continue our "roots" analogy, fellowship can be compared to the sunshine necessary to enable the roots to branch out and grow after being watered and fertilized. A healthy plant or tree doesn't stay the same size – it grows and branches out covering new ground and offering its benefits to more and more. So in our fellowship times together we seek to grow and branch out and invite others to join with us in our life together. I am always blessed to

see people enjoying one another's company on Sunday mornings during our fellowship times between and after worship. Rather than heading for home many of us stay and share in conversation and some munchies courtesy of the Fellowship Ministry Team – thanks to them for their faithful service! This past year we also enjoyed other times of fellowship like the new “Fairway to Heaven” mini-golf outing here in the building, the 4th of July fireworks gathering on our campus, numerous other meals and gatherings and Circle meetings. We held our first annual Men's Communion Breakfast with 100 men in attendance for worship and fellowship together. And how about the Lakeside Coffee House – what a wonderful new initiative for our congregation to share with our wider community. Thanks to those who have worked hard to make that a reality! Our Deacons continue to minister faithfully, often behind the scenes, to enhance our fellowship through ministries of care and compassion. And our Stephen Ministry is preparing to welcome 4 new members into our circle of those offering distinctively Christian care and support through one-on-one caregiving relationships with people in our congregation and community. Of course, we had the bittersweet times of sending the Robertson's into their retirement journey and the Wilhelmi's to their new call at Northbrook Presbyterian Church. Those times remind us once again we are to be rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ rather than in human leaders who come and go! As we bask in the sunshine of these times of fellowship, we remember Jesus' words telling us that “by this will all people know you are my disciples, by your love for one another.”

2010 was also a good year for mission outreach through our congregation. If we are “watered” in worship, “fertilized” through education and study, “warmed” through fellowship, then the end product leads us to “bear fruit” through our personal and corporate ministries of mission in Christ's name. This past year our congregation sent people to Xpujil, Mexico to help build cisterns for water collection, to Rebuilding Together in Milford to rehab a home, we hosted with South Oakland Shelter once again in June, sent our young people to Nashville for mission efforts there, hosted an Americorp service team in our building for 2 months as they did service projects here in the area, and had nearly 80 of our members participate in Reach Out Day in the fall. In addition to these hands-on mission efforts, you can see in our Annual Report that 19% of our total income for 2010 was expended in a variety of mission giving from within our budget as well as through a number of other programs and groups supporting different mission causes. Our “unofficial” goal has been to share 25% of whatever resources God provides for our congregation with others, so we are not quite there at least this year. But with God's blessing we are moving in that direction – your faithful response to last year's “Exuberant Generosity” stewardship

campaign has allowed to Session to approve a budget with a \$25,000 increase in our benevolence giving for 2011 – praise God! And we will once again send not just dollars but people in mission and service in 2011 – to the Gulf Coast in April, Rebuilding Together in May, a youth mission trip to Scranton, Pa. in June, hosting SOS once again, in addition to other efforts throughout the year. We will also host the Rev. Jim Caldwell and his wife Lois this March for a weekend Mission Workshop which will help us analyze our mission efforts and discover ways to advance our ministries in this area. As one person once said, “The Church does not have a mission, Mission has a Church” – meaning that mission is not just one ministry among many for us: it is the very heart of why we exist and the purpose which we serve. We are rooted and built up in Christ in order to be sent out with the words and deeds of God’s kingdom so that others may experience the good news just as we have!

In his book The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church, which our Session is reading together, author Reggie McNeal offers the following observation:

What if, when pastors get together, the question they asked each other was not, “How is your church doing?” In my denomination it’s “How’s your Sunday school doing? Or music program? Or youth program?” or any number of other programs. Almost all the questions for denominational research and reporting are about church institutional life: how many showed up, how frequently, how busy they were in church activities, how much did they give, and so forth. What if, instead, we asked about people, not the institution? What if denominational inquiries asked, “What percentage of your congregants feel they grew to be more like Jesus this past year?” What if church leaders asked each other, “How is God at work in your people?” or “Where do you see Jesus bustin’ out?”¹

Those are the questions we need to think about as we move forward in mission and ministry in 2011. Those are the questions answered by people who are continuing to be rooted and built up faith in Jesus Christ. Let’s make it our goal in the year ahead to have more people more like Jesus in the faith community known as Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian – people nurtured and nourished in worship, education, fellowship, and mission in the name of Jesus Christ in whom we are rooted, with whom we seek to walk humbly, to do justice, and love kindness until the time when God’s kingdom comes in all its fullness and glory! Amen!

¹ Reggie McNeal, The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church, Josey Bass, San Francisco, pp. 74-75.