

January 2019

The Root

Today's Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Colossians 2:6-7 [Our Centennial Scripture]

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: Last spring I was watching my grandson Bentley play on our driveway. He was distracted by two dandelions that had bloomed in my front lawn. He stopped his play, plucked the flowers, and brought them over to me so I could save them for him to present to his mom.

What is it about kids and dandelions? They love picking them. They love arranging them into bouquets, and they love presenting these flowers proudly to their mothers. It's like an inherent instinct with them. My kids did the same, and I remember joining my brother and sister to pick a plethora of the little flowers to present to our mother on Mothers' Day.

My perspective has changed. Dandelions are, after all and by definition, weeds, and most homeowners detest seeing a crop of dandelions spring up in their yards. I googled "dandelion roots" and "Why do dandelions have deep roots?" This is what I found.

"Dandelions produce a strong taproot most commonly found in the top 6-18" of the soil." [A dandelion's root can be a foot deep?] "When a seed germinates it produces a rosette of tiny leaves close to the ground surface and concentrates on growing a deep tap root. By the time you

see a dandelion plant it is well established, which is why it seems you can never get rid of all the dandelions in your lawn."

I live in a neighborhood of lush, green yards, and most of my neighbors faithfully treat their lawns with fertilizer, insecticide, and herbicide. Not wanting my lawn to stick out like a sore thumb, I have been using a lawn service for some time. When dandelions suddenly sprout, I'm no longer happy to see them. On the other hand, memories of harvesting the little weeds are warmly recalled.

St. Paul reminds us that we received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. He encourages us to remain "rooted and built up in Him." Our tap root is Jesus, and that root grows much longer and deeper than a dandelion's.

Dandelions thrive in spring sunshine and showers. We find ourselves "strengthened in the faith" as we were taught. Our faith is strengthened by Word and Sacrament. Our very life in Christ was germinated through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. So water plays a vital role in our strength, as well.

If we're not careful, our lawns can overflow with dandelions. Our lives in the Lord are MEANT to overflow. They are meant to overflow with thankfulness . . . giving thanks to the One who created us, sustains us, redeems us, and strengthens us.

We begin our centennial year by celebrating Jesus Christ, our root, and we pray that our lives would overflow with thankfulness for His grace.

After all, we're celebrating 100 years of grace at Grace!

~Paul Leckband

February 2019

Rooted in Grace

Today's Scripture: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in for us to do." Eph. 2:8-10

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: Since we're celebrating 100 years of grace at Grace Lutheran Church, let's make sure that we agree on some things. First of all, we need to agree that "grace" is God's undeserved love for sinners. He manifested that love by sending His Son Jesus Christ to pay the price for our sins. Now we have grace through faith, which—and this is important—is a gift from God. Our good works have nothing to do with God's grace, and they have nothing to do with our faith. How fitting that our predecessors agreed on this name for our church!

Let's agree, as well, that our faith—a gift from God—is rooted in Christ. Our faith is strengthened as we grow in our knowledge of Him and our love for Him through His Means of Grace: His Word and Sacraments.

Ephesians 2:8-9 is a favorite passage for many people, including me. It's a penultimate statement regarding salvation by grace. When St. Paul calls us to be "overflowing with thankfulness," our thankfulness for His grace should be toward the top of our list.

Ephesians 2:10 flows naturally from verses 8-9. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Because of God's great love for us, we are enabled to do good works, not because we have to, but because

we choose to. We choose to do good works as an outpouring of our gratitude for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The founders of this church understood that it was God's grace that led them to establish Grace Lutheran. They understood that God's love for them enabled them to establish this congregation, not just for their own good, but for the good of others for generations to come.

May we, too, understand that God's love enables us to carry on the mission and ministry of Grace Lutheran Church for God's glory and for the good of those He's called us to serve.

~Paul Leckband

March 2019 The Grapevine

Today's Scripture: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: Mrs. Schlueter, our neighbor across the alley, had a grape vine. It was a large grape vine which spread out along the wire fence that separated her lot from our church's parking lot. The grape crop always seemed prodigious—concord grapes, I think—and she didn't mind us neighborhood kids helping ourselves to the clusters of grapes that sprung from the grape vine.

First century Jews who heard Jesus teaching about the vine and its branches would have had no problems imagining a grape vine, since grapes were a common crop in Palestine. And grapes, obviously, can't grow on their own. They must grow from branches on the grape vine. No vine. No branches. No grapes.

Grace Lutheran Church has been blessed with 100 years of branches and fruit. Our vine has been faithful and constant. Our vine and our root has been Jesus Christ.

It was by His Word that our predecessors were inspired to seek their own congregation. It was by His Word that generations of His people have maintained Jesus' mission and ministry at Grace Lutheran, rooted in His Word and Sacraments.

Apart from Jesus there can be no saving faith. Apart from Jesus there can be no good works.

Apart from Jesus Christ there would be no Grace Lutheran Church. I think it's important to keep that in mind as we celebrate 100 years of accomplishments at this church. Many good things have been accomplished, both in this community and beyond, by His people, the branches of His vine. Forgiveness, faith, salvation—none is possible apart from the Vine. Apart from Him, we cannot seek to extend His Kingdom.

After all, isn't that what we're called to do?

~Paul Leckband

April 2019

Dual Membership

Today's Scripture: "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples.'" John 8:31 ESV

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: How did you become a member of Grace Lutheran? Some of you are lifetime members. You were baptized as an infant at Grace. Some of you became members when you were baptized as a youth or adult. Some of you transferred to Grace from another Lutheran congregation. And some of you became members through an "affirmation of faith."

How did you become a member of the Holy Christian Church? You became a Christian when Jesus called you by the Gospel, and He blessed you with a saving faith because of His grace—His undeserved love. So you have a dual membership! You are a member of Christ's Body, the Church, and you are a member of Grace Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Everybody knows that a plant needs water and fertilizer to grow and flourish. Christ provides the means for us to flourish as members of His Body. Our faith grows and flourishes as we spend time in His Holy Word, the Scriptures. That precious Word is read and preached from the lectern and pulpit during every worship service. But that Word is also available to us through Sunday School, Bible class, personal devotions and scripture reading.

Our faith grows and flourishes through the Sacrament of the Altar where we receive Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread

and the wine. This Sacrament is also served to us in worship services at Grace.

What happens to a plant that doesn't get enough water and fertilizer? At best it doesn't grow, doesn't thrive. At worst it shrivels and dies.

That's why Jesus encouraged the Jews "who had believed Him" to abide or continue in His Word.

That's why He encourages His 21st century disciples to continue to abide in His Word.

~Paul Leckband

May 2019

Better Than a Bath

Today's Scripture: "In (the ark) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand." 1 Peter 3:19b-22

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: Do you remember the Great Flood of 2011? Let me refresh your memory. "Torrential rains in the Upper Missouri River basin in May 2011 stressed all five main stream dams upriver of Yankton's Gavins Point, leaving the hydroelectric structure that backs up Lewis and Clark Lake as the last line of defense against downstream deluges . . . Up and down the Missouri River, the 2011 flooding caused more than \$2 billion in damages, including 4,000 flooded homes, and resulted in five deaths . . . three miles of I-680 between Omaha and I-29 near Council Bluffs, IA, were destroyed . . ." "It was speculated that the total cost to Eppley Airfield would top \$22 million. ["The Great Flood of 2011," nebraskalife.com]

Imagine the horrendous cost of Noah's Flood. God, in His anger over the depravity of the human race, unleashed a flood that topped the highest mountains—over the entire globe! Every living animal and every human being, save Noah and his family, were wiped out. Imagine how long it took the earth to recover from this massive destruction.

St. Peter refers to this flood as a symbol of Baptism. God in His grace did NOT allow the entire human race to perish but had mercy on Noah and

his family. He allowed the animals on the ark to repopulate the planet. He made Noah's family the ancestors of all humankind, including you, me and our families.

Our Baptism did more than remove any dirt from our bodies. The Bible promises that Baptism saves us. While the rainbow assures us of God's promise that He will never again obliterate the earth and wipe out humankind by a flood, Baptism assures us that our sin is washed away, and we become God's children.

As we celebrate Grace Lutheran's anniversary year, let's take a moment and celebrate our Baptism. Through Baptism we are saved "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand."

Now that's something worth celebrating!

~Paul Leckband

June 2019

The Kingdom Belongs to Children

Today's Scripture: "Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there." Matt. 19:13-15

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: There are many examples of Jesus' disciples and their failure to fully grasp His ministry on earth. Today's scripture describes one of those occasions. The disciples rebuke those who are trying to maneuver their children into a blessing from the Savior. Jesus ends up rebuking the disciples.

Over the 100 years of Grace Lutheran's existence, we've taken seriously our Lord's charge to "Let the little children come to me." Our pastors frequently preach a children's message during our Sunday worship. Sunday School is a vital part of our mission and ministry. We host Vacation Bible School every summer, which not only serves our own members but other families of our community.

And let's not forget our financial support for members who choose to send their children to Christ Lutheran School and Lutheran High Northeast.

Our children have the same need as we do to be "rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith..." The root of their faith is the same as

the root of our faith—belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—the truth that forgiveness and salvation comes by God's grace from Him alone.

It all begins when we bring our children and grand-children to be baptized into God's Kingdom by the Living Water of Holy Baptism. It continues as we bring our children and grandchildren into the presence of God's Holy Word—the Bread from Heaven.

There are two huge implications regarding our support for children. First of all, we get to "enjoy" the lively distractions that children, especially little children, bring to our worship services. Praise God for the commitment of their parents and grandparents to bring them regularly to the house of the Lord.

Second, supporting our children is not a cheap proposition, and some may wonder whether it's a wise spending of our dollars to support agencies of Christian education.

Could there be a better legacy for our congregation? Grace Lutheran Church takes seriously our Savior's command to "Let the little children come to Me..." It is a wise investment in the future leaders in our congregation and beyond, as we strive with the Lord's blessing to raise up the next generations of leaders in our churches, schools, families, and communities.

~Paul Leckband

July 2019

More Than Donuts

Today's Scripture: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ . . . if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." 1 John 1:3, 7

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: It's not unusual for churches to have a fellowship time, usually between church services or, like we do at Grace Lutheran, between the Sunday School/Bible Class hour and Sunday morning worship. In case you didn't know, everyone's invited to enjoy donuts, sweet rolls, cookies, coffee, orange juice . . .

And more! Fellowship time is more than just enjoying treats. It's a time when members get together to visit before the worship service. If you've been to our fellowship time in the church basement, you know that things can get somewhat raucous. And fellowship time extends into the sanctuary upstairs, as members and visitors enjoy conversation before worship begins.

Wait! There's still more! After the pastors make their appearance, they invite us to greet each other, and so there's even more fellowship time.

But fellowship is more than just greeting one another. Here's a definition of "fellowship" from the Christian Cyclopedia (cyclopedia.lcms.org). "Christian fellowship is common sharing in the Gospel, in faith, and in other spiritual and mutual gifts. God creates it by calling us into fellowship or partnership with His Son so that we share in

all Christ's works, blessings, glory, and goods. It is a union of believers in Christ through fellowship of the Spirit. This communion of believers is unity or 'oneness' in Christ which transcends race, social position, and death . . . As faith always produces fruit, so fellowship of the Spirit in Christ manifests itself in action. Christian fellowship is activity in the Gospel. Its mark is love. It causes Christians to treat each other as close relatives. It is a fellowship of feelings, kindnesses, and a communication of help . . . "

That's a pretty long definition, so please let me summarize. Our fellowship with one another is a fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of actual familial relationships. It's conversation that extends the friendliness of our members to each other but, perhaps more importantly, to those visitors who join us for worship.

It's conversation that inquires and encourages. It's conversation that seeks to find out how our brothers and sisters are managing their circumstances of life, whether circumstances of joy or circumstances of sorrow, pain, and need.

And this conversation extends itself into visiting each other wherever that may be—at home, in the hospital, in assisted living facilities, at work, in the community, at special events, in sports, in Bible classes like the weekly women's Bible study and bi-weekly men's Bible study. And this is all made possible through the Gospel by which Jesus Christ has called us into fellowship with Him.

Enjoy fellowship with one another. Prayerfully consider how to "stretch" your fellowship with others.

~Paul Leckband

August 2019

Daily Bread

Today's Scripture: "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty . . . I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'" John 6:35, 47-51

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matt. 6:11)
Sound familiar? It should since it's the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. Many of us had to memorize Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer as part of our confirmation instruction. Here's a review from catechism.cph.org.

"Give us this day our daily bread. What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. What is meant by daily bread? Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body..."

Next month members of Grace Lutheran, along with many former members and other friends, will gather for Grace Night Out. This will be a grand celebration of our centennial year, and it will include a delicious "feast" that will leave no one hungry.

We have much to be celebrating as a congregation celebrating 100 years of mission and ministry. Luther continues to enumerate many examples of daily bread, including "food, drink" . . . We'll gather together and give thanks for a wonderful meal that evening . . . "house, home" . . . We give thanks for our marvelous church home, along with the blessing of our own personal homes and house . . . "money, goods" . . . Many of our members have been moved to give generously, making possible major restoration and renovations to our church facilities . . . "devout workers" . . . We give thanks for the many faithful pastors and lay leaders who have contributed to Grace's mission and ministry through the years . . . "good reputation" . . . Grace enjoys a wonderful reputation that extends well beyond our immediate city and surrounding areas . . . "good friends" . . . The Lord has blessed each of us with fellow members of our church family, individuals we can truly count as friends.

And let's not forget Jesus our Bread from Heaven. As wonderful as the meal will be at Grace Night Out next month, eventually we will feel hungry again. Not so with Jesus! He comes to us as daily Bread in Scripture, and He has blessed us with faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word in church, Bible class, Sunday School, a Christian day school and a Lutheran High School. He comes to us through the Living Water of Holy Baptism and in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He comes to us through our many relationships with faithful Christians, including our own "devout husband or wife, devout children." (Quoted from Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer)

We'll gather together to celebrate our 100 years of grace at Grace, and we'll remember the innumerable ways that God shares His daily Bread with us.

~Paul Leckband

September 2019

What's Our Address?

Today's Scripture: (Jesus said), "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts. 1:8

Our 2019 Centennial Scripture: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Col. 2:6-7

Today's Meditation: What's the address of Grace Lutheran Church in Norfolk, Nebraska? What's our street address? I'll give you a moment to think . . . No fair asking someone else or checking us out in the phone directory or on our web page! Time's up! Our street address is 416 Park Avenue.

Or is it? A constant challenge for many churches is a parochial mindset, i.e., a mindset that tends to think of our ministry in entirely local terms. It's easy to get very comfortable with thinking that our mission and ministry doesn't extend much beyond our property lines.

When Jesus spoke to His first century disciples in Jerusalem, just before He ascended into heaven, He certainly made it clear that they weren't to think of their address as located in Jerusalem only. He charged them to "be My witnesses," not only in Jerusalem, not only "in all Judea and Samaria," but "to the ends of the earth."

A daunting challenge? To be sure! Most of those first disciples had likely never strayed beyond the boundaries of Palestine, and they were expected to be Jesus' witnesses to the whole earth!

I have news for you. Jesus' words were also meant for His 21st century disciples, and that would be you and me. A daunting challenge? Of

course, but not impossible. It's not impossible, because we have the same promise that those first century Christians had. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."

Jesus spoke those words 10 days in advance of the first Pentecost. He speaks those words to us now who have received the power of the Holy Spirit through our Baptism . . . Who continue to be nourished by the power of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

Our Lord in His great love never intended His Gospel message to be reserved for a few Jewish Christians in the first century. He intended the message of His forgiveness and salvation to reach throughout the whole world. And He empowers us to be His witnesses.

We've been celebrating the centennial of our home congregation. We've had 100 years of God's grace at Grace to celebrate, but we have something even greater to celebrate.

Somewhere in time you became the beneficiary of that grace. You became forgiven and saved through faith in the one and only Lord and Savior of all humankind—the root of our faith. That faith is a free gift, and now our Savior entrusts the Message to us.

And so we become His evangelists. It may be to our own circle of family and friends. It may be to an acquaintance at work or even a complete stranger whom you encounter. It may be through your offerings that support our congregation's mission budget. It may be through your personal support for missionaries or for the mission and ministry of Orphan Grain Train, Christ Lutheran School, Lutheran High Northeast, our Concordia University System or seminaries.

It's a sacred commission that we've been given. If you've never thought of yourself as a missionary before, guess what? Jesus Christ has commissioned you—has commissioned Grace Lutheran Church in

Norfolk, Nebraska—to spread the Good News in Norfolk, Nebraska, the United States, and “to the ends of the earth.”

Celebrate the centennial of Grace Lutheran Church! Celebrate the missionaries whom Christ has empowered to spread the Gospel “to the ends of the earth.” Celebrate . . . because He has honored you by making you one of His very own missionaries.

Celebrate!

~Paul Leckband