

Proper 19C
September 15, 2019
Exodus 32:7-14; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 3:5-11; Luke 15:1-10

GOD GAVE THE GROWTH

The soil had been tilled & the first seeds sown, when on September 10, 1944, the mission congregation that three months later would choose the name PEACE, gathered in an E. C. Hughes portable classroom as Pastor Luther Anderson presided at worship for the very first time.

Years later, Pastor Anderson shared his remembrance of what took place that Sunday:

“The first service was memorable,” he said, “...my first service as a young ordained pastor. Eighteen attended that first worship; [but] there were only 15 when I pronounced the benediction. One lady left early to fulfill a promise to her husband, another fainted and was taken home! I wondered what my ministry was to become.”

It didn't take long for that number to increase. By November 28th, Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church was officially organized with 46 charter members. The sown seeds were sprouting and growing—and beginning to produce seeds of their own.

A pamphlet from early 1945 speaks to the “growing pains” the congregation was experiencing and the need for a new building to serve as its home base:

We are “confronted with the problem of squeezing,” Pastor Anderson wrote.

The E. C. Hughes School portable is “not adequate.” Sunday School attendance is running close to 50 with more classes to be added.

A plan was hatched to build on a lot of land at 39th and Thistle. The estimated cost for this first building—utilizing as much second-hand material as possible and as much volunteer labor as could be had? \$3,500. The pamphlet goes on:

“The task before us is [this]:

1. For the men—to set aside each Tuesday and Thursday as “work days” on the chapel in order to have it ready as soon as possible.
2. For the women—to plan for interior improvements which will add beauty to Peace.
3. For all of us—to interest others in our church and welcome them into Christian fellowship.
4. For all of us—to be loyal to Christ and to his church by regular attendance at services.”

The vision caught on; the money started coming in. On July 7, 1945, ground was broken for the Chapel and nine months later the building was dedicated. Yet even before the first shovel of dirt was turned or the first nail hammered home, there was already a recognition that the congregation must think beyond that moment to what its needs would be down the road.

“We expect to outgrow our chapel in a few years—maybe 3, 5, or 7 years from now,” Pr. Anderson wrote. “Much depends upon the war, our growth in membership, availability of materials, economic conditions of that day, etc. This is why we are thinking in terms of the future...”

Our church must be so built that it will live for 100 years and still be a place of beauty in our community. We must think now of how adequate our church [building] will be in [the year] 2045.”

How's that for vision? Seeds sown... Seeds grown... over and over again.

If you read my [Pastor's Pen article in Peace Notes](#),¹ then you know about the SURPRISE we recently received in the mail: Pastor Anderson and his wife Lilian left a bequest to Peace Lutheran in their will. Last week we deposited a check for over \$27,000—an incredibly generous LEGACY GIFT from two faithful stewards.

This unexpected love gift gives new momentum to our effort to refurbish and update the narthex—the very same physical portion of our building that the Andersons were instrumental in establishing.

75 years after Pastor Anderson delivered his first sermon in that portable classroom, their gift is both an example and an invitation for all to consider: will we make the continuing mission of God in this place part of our last will and testament; will you and I join them and commit ourselves to giving a final tithe?

In his first letter to Corinth, Paul reminds that community who gets the credit when good things happen in ministry: *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”*

The first seeds of what would become Peace Lutheran Church were planted long before Luther Anderson arrived in West Seattle. And after his and Lilian's time of watering those seeds, the continuing formation of Peace was passed on to other leaders, each of whom in the ensuing decades brought their own gifts to bear. *And God gave the growth.*

Such growth, however, is not automatic. Scripture is full of stories of lean times; of times when God's people lost their vision, became complacent got caught in bickering and one-upmanship, or stopped looking to God as their source of life and good.

Our first lesson marks one of those moments, the moment when—with Moses holding counsel with God on Mt. Sinai—the people became captive to fear and decided that something they could see and touch—a golden calf—would serve them better than a God whom they could neither see nor name.

When God gets royally ticked off with their behavior, it's Moses who—in one of the great role reversals—ends up reminding God of all the promises God has made to this people. AS STIFF NECKED AND WAYWARD AS THEY ARE, Moses says, YOU PROMISED YOU'D STICK BY THEM.

Moses calls on God to turn and remember, and in this remembering the LORD “changes his mind about the disaster he planned to bring on his people.”

Every congregation has lean years and years of plenty; times when the way forward is uncertain and times when the mission is crystal clear. Through 75 years Peace has experienced both ends of that spectrum.

In yesterday's Seattle Times there was yet another editorial about the infamous “Seattle freeze.”

The writer, who moved here a year ago, spoke about the lack of human connection she's experienced; about having more eye contact with dogs than with people; about not being able to engage with people the way human beings were wired to engage. The Freeze, she said, had become such a negative and dominant reality for her that, one year in, she is plotting her escape.²

¹ You can find the article by following this link: <http://www.peacelutheranseattle.org/?p=2947>

² The “Seattle Freeze” has me plotting my escape. Phyllis Coletta. *The Seattle Times*, 9/14/2019, page A9.

Friends, as I read her article I wanted to tell her – it’s not that way everywhere in Seattle!

COME TO PEACE!

- Experience the buzzing hive of conversation as people connect—human being to human being—each Sunday morning—a buzz that practically drowns out the prelude from week to week.
- Come and experience a caring community whose message is WE SEE YOU—and THERE’S ROOM FOR YOU IN THIS PLACE.
- A community where the GOOD SHEPHERD with his unlimited reach keeps showing up—in WORD and TABLE, FONT and FELLOWSHIP—gathering us in and making us his own.
- A community committed to reaching beyond these walls and doors to IMPACT THE WORLD FOR GOOD;
- A community that believes GOD’S WORK can happen through OUR HANDS.

If the Freeze is your primary experience, I want to tell her; if being in Seattle feels more like wilderness than Promised Land, then come to Peace and experience the antidote to that reality.

As I’ve been sifting through Peace archives and anniversary pamphlets from 10, 25, and 50 years ago, one of the things that comes through those remembrances is JOY in the sense of accomplishment, the JOY at obtaining a new milestone in the congregation’s life and ministry.

**Did you notice the number of times JOY punctuates our gospel this morning?
As a remedy to the grumbling Pharisees, Jesus invites us into JOY.**

**The lost lamb is found – call your friends! Gather your neighbors! REJOICE!
THERE IS MORE JOY IN HEAVEN OVER ONE WAYWARD SOUL WHO TURNS TOWARD HOME
THAN OVER 99 WHO SEE NO NEED FOR TURNING.**

**The lost coin is found—THROW A PARTY! Telling your friends and neighbors:
REJOICE WITH ME! FOR THAT WHICH WAS LOST HAS BEEN FOUND!**

JOY is at the heart of the gospel.

- The JOY of knowing I’m forgiven and free;
- the JOY of being loved and included;
- the JOY of trusting that no matter how far I may wander the SHEPHERD will search for me ‘til I’m found;
- the JOY of being part of genuine community;
- the JOY of having Jesus as our forever companion as we walk the walk and talk the talk.

We reflect that JOY each time we gather. We keep an eye out for folks who are new to our fellowship. Our job is to see that they take a share of that JOY with them when they leave this place.

Nothing makes the seeds of faith grow more steadily and reach maturity more quickly than JOY!

Who could have predicted that 75 years later, Peace would hold such a strong place in Luther and Lilian’s hearts. How to account for it? Perhaps it was JOY.

“I planted, yes; and Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

Let us pray...

Lord, we are so grateful for those who've come before us, every one of them who planted seeds and nurtured them into thriving community. Jesus, we know you're not finished with us yet; we know and believe we've been planted here for a purpose. Keep walking with us, keep guiding us and inspiring us with your Holy Spirit, so that more and more we become the beloved community you long for us to be.

And as we continue down that road, keep us always in JOY. In your holy name we pray. Amen.