Building Blocks – (Reformation Sunday)

Matthew 7:24-29 Kimby Young

Ephesians 2:13-22 October 29, 2017

I have been thinking a lot about the church lately – obviously, that’s my job. I’ve been thinking about growing the church, building up the church, being more of what God calls us to be, and all kinds of ways to do that. In church growth books and workshops, they advise you to start with the strengths of the church – the church assets and resources. In thinking about that, I discern two enormous strengths of this church. You, the people of the church, are the greatest strength, the greatest resource of our church. You are loving, caring, faithful, and good. You work hard. You do your best. And you try to make the world a better place. The other greatest strength of this congregation is your heritage – the legacy of faithfulness of generations who have gone before us. 150 years on this corner in Gardner – serving fully and faithfully. The names of the saints of this church roll through our heads – of good and faithful, honorable and generous, hardworking and loving people – who have built this church into what it is today. And I don’t mean the building. I mean the character. We heard about it in the announcements this morning. We have talked about it during our anniversary year and other times. You have received a tremendous legacy of faithfulness which you continue today and contribute to for tomorrow. And even beyond this local congregation, our heritage is one of our greatest strengths as Christians. We have people to look to and learn from for many generations. That’s what Reformation Sunday is all about. Remembering the past and honoring those who have gone before us. However, Reformation Sunday is not just about the past. It is even more so about the future. Our reformation heritage says – when we see something wrong we try to fix it; when we aren’t quite doing our best we try to improve. We are reformed, and always reforming – continuing to re-form ourselves into what God calls us to be. There is always room for improvement. We know we don’t have everything right. And perfection is not what God expects of us. But God does expect us to continue to grow and learn and be the best that we can be – individually and as a church. So on Reformation Sunday, we look to the past, yes, and we give thanks for the past. But the greater call is to the future – to work now so that the legacy will continue to God’s glory; to work now to build a future filled with hope and promise, overflowing with the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have a lot to build on here. We have a strong steady dependable solid foundation on which to build. The scripture for today reminds us that God is that rock on which we base everything, and the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ is the solid basis of all that we do as individuals and as a church. In building up the church, Ephesians says, the apostles and the prophets provide the foundation – the wider base that keeps us steady and healthy and strong and right. The apostles, of course, are the first believers, the first followers of Jesus, the first Christians – our New Testament witness. The prophets refer to the Old Testament roots of our heritage – the faith of Abraham and Moses and Israel. The faith of covenant and grace. The remembrance of God’s presence and provision for generation upon generation. Ephesians goes on to say that Christ is the cornerstone or the keystone or the most important connecting strength that holds everything together. It is in Jesus that everything makes sense. It is through Jesus that all building – past, present or future – is possible. It is in Jesus that we find our center, our source and our strength for all that we do. Ephesians goes on to say that what is being built here is “a holy temple” and a “dwelling in which God lives.” Indeed that we are that holy temple – that dwelling place for God. God lives in you, in us - together as a church. Your language here at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner even carries on that image of building. Your areas of ministry are designated as “Pillars” building on that foundation of apostles and prophets, held together by that cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Everything we do here is meant to build up God’s temple - to be that place on earth where God dwells.

We – you and I – are meant to be the place where God lives in the world, the avenue through whom God touches the world, the way God acts in the world to show love and mercy, grace and peace. We are to be the instrument, the conduit, the point of contact, the method God uses. We are the love of God in flesh and blood, the hands and feet of Christ. We are meant to be the way that other people see God and know God and begin to interact with God. We are, you are, God’s holy temple – God’s way into the world. Are we? Do we live up to that high calling?

You see, the building up of the church is so not about this building, this structure, this place. It is about the spirit of this place and the people of this place – God’s Spirit moving among us. How is God moving among us? How is God stirring us to touch the world and share the love of Jesus Christ? It’s happening. God is moving among us and taking us … to a future only God can imagine right now. And God is calling you to come along and to continue to do your part.

I’ve been thinking all week, remembering all week, that old finger play – Here’s the church, Here’s the steeple – Remember? Who remembers that? Who can do that? Let’s do it together. The tricky part is getting your hands in the right position – treading your fingers together underneath. If you know how to do it – help somebody near you who might be having trouble. Yes, this is the interactive part – everyone try this. Everybody got it. Anybody need help? No child left behind – no child of God left behind.

Alright, so you get your hands ready with the fingers inside and the steeple pointing up – and the thumbs ready to be the doors. And it kind of looks like a little old fashioned church. Right? Let’s say it together. “Here’s the church. Here’s the steeple. Open the doors. And there are the people.” Wiggle your fingers. Let’s do it again – just ‘cause we can. “Here’s the church. Here’s the steeple. Open the doors. And there are the people.” OK. The most important part of this little rhyme is the people – and the movement of the people so you can see the life. The church is not about the steeple or the bell tower. It’s about opening the doors and letting God move through you. The church is about the people of God active and serving in the world. The church is about the people of God connecting and loving and caring and sharing. The church is about God’s love in action in all that you do, all that you say, all that you are. Here’s the church. You are the church. Never forget that. Remember the saints of the past, the heritage of our faith, the gifts of grace from every generation that has gone before, and is passed down to you in your hands. Remember. Then build on that grace as a witness to God’s presence still active and powerful among us. We are the church. Let us be the church that future generations look back on with gratitude. Let us be the church alive and thriving – that all may see God’s glory and come to worship God together, to serve God wherever the Spirit leads us. In the name of Jesus Christ our rock and our redeemer.