

May 4, 2025  
Rev. Lisa Schrott  
Psalm 1:1-3 & Colossians 2:6-7  
*Root in Christ & Engaged in Community*

In the life of the church year we are in the season of Easter or Eastertide. This is a transitional season – an already, but not yet season. We know that the tomb is empty and that Christ is risen. And yet, like the disciples, we are not quite sure what to do with that information. How does this affect our everyday lives? Do we just go back to our pre-resurrection lives, trying to keep a low profile lest we get caught up in the empire’s plans to eradicate the voices of the opposition? And yes, you can insert your “May the Force” be you joke here on this Star Wars Sunday (check today’s date if you have no idea what I am talking about).

During this season of Eastertide we will look to the disciples and the early church to gain a deeper appreciation of what a life that is rooted and engaged looks like. Rooted in Christ and Engaged in the community in which we dwell. This morning we begin by hearing from words from the Psalms – beautiful words just read by Elliot – that use a metaphor of a tree rooted in the ground by streams of water that bears fruit as a model for our lives in God. And we hear words from Paul’s Letter to the church in Colossae, a town in Asia Minor, now Turkey.

The Colossians were a church founded not by Paul, but by a man named Epaphras. Paul calls Epaphras out as a faithful minister of Christ. Paul writes to this church because he has come to understand that they were facing threats from various spheres of social and religious intimidation. They were being told that they needed to engage in certain rituals, follow certain cryptic and secret teachings and engage with angelic mediators in order to be true followers of Christ. In his writings, Paul stresses the authority of Christ and Christ alone. These words from Chapter 2 verses 6-7 are a summary of Paul’s letter and teachings. Hear now these words to church to Colossae and words to us today:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. **The Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God.**

---

Today is PCO’s official 61st birthday. PCO was chartered as a church of what was to become the PC(USA) on May 4, 1964. Last year we had a big 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary bash and as we celebrated the hands and feet and shoulders on which this church has been built, we also celebrated who God is calling us to be in this place and time, and where God may be calling us in the future. And it was just a bit over a year ago that the PCO Session adopted our Journey to 2030 vision which included our commitment to be:

- A welcoming congregation where meaningful connections are made.
- A congregation that is intergenerationally inclusive.
- A congregation actively building partnerships.

As we live into this vision, committees of the church have sought to strengthen places where these actions were already in place, as well as develop new opportunities. Last June we embarked on an Intergenerational Mission Week with 35-participants across ages engaging in service projects with some long-standing, as well as, newer mission partners. Participants expressed deep appreciation of the value of the intergenerational aspect of the projects, as well as the opportunities to dig deeper into the challenges facing our community. Our 2025 Intergenerational Mission Week will be June 9 – 13. There will be opportunities to serve during the day, and in the late afternoon and early evening. We will kick the week off on Pentecost Sunday, June 8 with an all-church picnic hosted by Parish Life.

Our worship services during the season of Easter will prepare us for our upcoming Intergenerational Mission Week in June. We will look to scripture as we explore our call to care for creation, to care for our refugee neighbors, to promote peace – shalom - in a fractured world and to address issues related to food insecurity.

We start with scripture as our grounding because this is where we learn what it means to be *in community* and are inspired – and aspire – to make the connections deeper and broader. “It is said that "history repeats itself," and the parallels drawn here might bear that out. But we also can learn from history. From the call to Abraham to the Protestant Reformation, the scriptures and the history books recount the faith and the failure of God's people to live up to their calling. It is the story of God's power and forgiveness. The Church is not MAN MADE and it is more than the sum of its individual members, but a testimony to the POWER of God's redeeming love at work among men in the world. Christ said, "for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them". Our togetherness in Christ makes us strong.” I shared these words last year at the worship service marking our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I share them again this year because they bear repeating. These words closed the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary history of Okemos United Presbyterian Church, as we were known then, written by Meridian Township official and PCO church leader, Carlene Webster.<sup>1</sup>

The Church is a testimony to the power of God's redeeming love at work among the people. Christ said, for where two or three are **gathered in my name**, there am I in the midst of them. Our togetherness in Christ makes us strong. These words echo the message Paul wrote to the Colossians. It is through Christ – through his ministry during his time on earth and the gift of salvation we receive through his death and resurrection – that we are formed as the church. That we become true disciples of Christ. New Testament scholar Dr. Stan Saunders describes Paul's vision of discipleship for the Colossians this way: “The roots of discipleship lie in the convictions, confessions, and life together of the Christian community in worship, where Christ's saving and reconciling power is discerned, tested, and embodied. The discipleship evoked in this letter (Colossians) does not consist in the heroic, or virtuous practices of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Carlene Webster. *The History of the Presbyterian Church in Okemos*. Prepared for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Okemos United Presbyterian Church.

individuals, but the nurture of communities that manifest the realities of God's new creation in Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Last week in his Creation Care sermon, Ewen Todd spoke about the realities of being a "new creation in Christ," that is our call to a new humanity, about how God the potter shapes us as God is shaping creation. This gives us the responsibility to act as God's agents to care for the world we share. Celtic Christians, as well as other sects throughout history, have said that God gifted us with two books, the small book of scripture and the great book of nature. The two books inform each other, with the glory of creation manifested in the book of scripture and the scripture speaking to us to be stewards of nature. The mutuality of this relationship is seen in the opening chapter of Colossians in what is known as the *Christ Hymn*.

He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. Colossians 1:15-18

Christ is the origin and the source of the new creation we are called to be. We are rooted in Christ. This hymn affirms the sufficiency of Christ – what he has accomplished through his ministry and his death and resurrection. The Colossians did not need to rely on, or take marching orders from, the empire or false teachers or a culture that led them to feel alienated and fearful. Instead of being captive to these dark forces, Paul assures the Colossians that they were to feel confident in their place as children of God. Through Jesus Christ all that is necessary for the full reconciliation between God and humankind has been accomplished. And because of that reconciliation, we who follow Christ become his body here on earth. We become a connected and communal body engaging in the ministry Christ taught us and modeled for us: healing creation, feeding the hungry, restoring fractured relationships and making sure everyone has a place at the table where they know they belong. These are tasks we will undertake during the Intergenerational Mission Week.

This morning during the education hour you have an opportunity to learn more about one the projects we will work together on – the formation of a Prayer Path in the woods behind the church. The Green Team has partnered with the middle school and high school youth groups to begin the planning of this project. The congregation will be invited to participate in this work on Thursday, June 12 in the late afternoon and early evening. This new Prayer Path will marry the small book of scripture and the great book of nature, as we emphasize our commitment to caring for the creation we have been blessed with here at PCO. Again you can learn more during our education hour today.

---

<sup>2</sup> Stan Saunders. Commentary. Book of Colossians. *The Discipleship Study Bible*. Westminster John Knox, 2008; p 2004.

Paul's letter to the Colossians is a powerful reminder that the roots of our discipleship lie in the convictions, confessions, and our life together as a Christian community. In his letter Paul emphasizes that this life together begins with worship. The piece of the *Christ Hymn* from Colossians chapter 1 I shared is one the earliest known Christian hymns. While we don't have the associated music, scholars believe that this hymn was used to teach and reinforce the divinity of Christ as "creator and lord" and the "very embodiment of God," that is the image of the invisible God.<sup>3</sup> While the church in Colossae might not have been very old at the time this letter was written, probably substantially less than our 61 years here at PCO, nonetheless there was a need to reinforce the person and work of Christ. And what better way to do it than through music.

As gathered community, people of faith have sung their hopes and dreams, their laments and their anger, their praise and thanksgiving for millennia. They have praised God with trumpets and lute and harp, with tambourines and bells and string and pipe, as we heard in the Call to Worship. And they have praised God with their voices. Music has been a powerful way for our theology to be shared – the attributes of our triune God. We hear of a God who will never forsake us no matter how deep the distress or the fiery the trials in the hymn *How Firm a Foundation*, that the handbells will play in just a moment. In the choir anthem *Comfort Me, Dear Lord*, we likewise hear of a God who will accompany us through the difficult days of our life and bring us peace. We will be sent out into world with a reminder that

"So has the church, in liturgy and song, in faith and love, through centuries of wrong, borne witness to the truth in every tongue: Alleluia!"<sup>4</sup>

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The tomb is empty and that made all the difference to the church in Colossae to which Paul wrote.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

We here at PCO are called to do the same – to be rooted and built up by Christ so that we too may go into the world to be Christ's body, the church. To heal creation, feed the hungry, restore fractured relationships and make sure everyone has a place at the table where they know they belong. May it be so. Join me in prayer.

---

<sup>3</sup> Study Note. Colossians 1:15-20. *The Discipleship Study Bible*. Westminster John Knox, 2008; p 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Pratt Green. When in Our Music God Is Glorified. *Glory to God Hymnal*. #641 Westminster John Knox, 2013.