

SERMON
 4:1-7, 11-16
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 November 19, 2017

I Corinthians 3:1-9 Ephesians
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“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. . For we are God’s servants, working together, you are God’s field, God’s building.” (I Corinthians 3:6-9)

With all of the **darkness and trouble** in our world, **now is the time** for the **Christian church**, for First Lutheran Church **to be the best that it can be**. Our world is so focused upon **“individuality,” doing your own thing, going your own way, looking out for number one**, that we are **lonelier and more hopeless than ever**. **God counters** our lonely, dog-eat-dog world by **inviting every person** into the **caring and compassion** of the **people of God** who gather as brothers and sisters of Jesus, beloved children of God. **God is our partner** – as together we **plant faith**, which gives life here, now, and forever. And God is our partner – as together we **care for our neighbor and world**. The **strength of God’s love, compassion and healing power** at work **can best be seen** in the face of sickness, poverty, struggling relationships, job loss, even in the face of death. **God and God’s people show up** in the **toughest places** to give **life, healing and hope**.

God has been about the business of **planting love and faith** through First Lutheran in Aitkin for 125 years. God has been busy watering, nurturing and growing **love and faith** in this First Lutheran family, and through this family out into the community and world. It all started with:

- **Thirteen Swedish settlers** and **Pastor Collins** planting a congregation.
- **Each following generation** nurtured the seeds of God’s love and faith.
- And **God gave the growth** as God’s people focused upon:
 - **Living into the grace of God** gifted to us in Jesus.
 - **Sharing the Good News** of God’s great and **unfailing love, mercy, compassion** and **hope**.
 - **Making a Godly difference** in the world beyond their doors.

Everything good that has happened here over the last 125 years has been **thanks be to God**. **Pastors** have come and gone. **Saints** have been born, baptized, lived and died. The **Lord's Supper** has been shared again and again. Last week a new little child of God, **Sailor Dox**, was **baptized**. A couple of weeks earlier, eleven sophomores **affirmed their baptism** as adult members of this congregation. They are **Jon Blanchette**, **Alaina Chute**, **Joe Cummings**, **Carter Dox**, **Kendra Gruhlke**, **Elizabeth McMillan**, **Abigail Monse**, **Carter Olson**, **Hannah Paulbeck**, **Sam Sadlowsky** and **Reagan Wilson**. And today, 100 year old **Maurice Skar**, laid low by a stroke, worships God at home. His **beloved children** are gathered around his bedside and the **Body of Christ** is lifting him up in prayer here in this sanctuary. Maurice has worshiped here every Sunday as long as most people can remember.

As years passed, **each generation** of God's people who gathered here at First **had to decide** what "**following Jesus**" meant in their own day. Would they be:

- A **social club** or a **healing place**?
- **Welcoming the stranger** or **ignoring them**?
- Concentrated on **self-care** or on **mission** to community and world?
- **Sacrificing** time, talent and treasure to follow Jesus or **just paying lip service** to Jesus?
- **Trusting** only what they thought was **humanly possible** or trusting that **with God's help all things are possible**?

How did First Lutheran **turn out to be the kind of church that it is today**? How did this **wonderful facility** come to be? How did the quality of our **worship and music** ministry come to be? How did our very well-known **ministry to children, youth and families** come to be? What about the **passion for community service** that is so admired here in Aitkin? How did that happen? What about the **tens of thousands of dollars that we send along to support missions** in our Northeastern Minnesota Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and missionaries and relief workers all over the world? How did that happen? A mission that keeps this place **hopping 7 days a week** – how did that happen? **Open doors** and **open hearts**? **God's blessing**?

One plants. Another waters. And **God gives the growth**. That's what the **Apostle Paul** tells the cantankerous, often divided church in **Corinth**. It doesn't

matter who baptized us. It matters that we are **all baptized into Christ**. In **Ephesians 4**, the Apostle Paul tells the Christians at **Ephesus when the people of God are working together** in the best way, it “**promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love**.” The work of the generations that came before us here in this place, has helped to **prepare the ground, plant** the seeds, **water, nurture** and bring about the church we delight in being a part of. The **love and faith** that we witness in and around this place is thanks be to God! And God has used **lots of folks just like us** to do it. And God is **still faithfully moving** in us here **today**.

If you hear a **sermon** that says what you need to hear - thanks be to God. If we are able to **pay the bills** here - thanks be to God. If someone shows up at your door with a **hot dish** after you have lost a loved one – thanks be to God. If you enjoy a **wonderful choir anthem** – thanks be to God. If someone **discovers the love of God here and comes to faith** – thanks be to God. If **young parents have the wisdom to baptize and raise** their little ones in faith here – thanks be to God.

Our Christian faith is not about following the Apostle Paul, Apollos, Martin Luther, Pastor Bob, Pastor Melissa, Pastor Doug, Pastor Jordan or Pastor Darrell. Our Christian faith is about us, **individually and together, following Jesus in God’s mission to love and give faith** to every person in this world. In last week’s text, God recklessly, generously, graciously planted seeds in **every corner** of the world, **every environment, good soil or not, in every life**. God’s amazing planting carries on and sustains what we do here in this place today. **We join God in planting**.

God’s planting here at First Lutheran – Do you think:

- **Faithful planting and nurturing have been happening** amongst us?
- We have been **heading in the right direction** as a congregation?
- **God has been giving growth** in our lives and mission?

Each generation before us, as **individuals** and as a **congregation**, has had to figure out **what it means to follow Jesus**. **Now it is our turn – 125 Years Growing in God’s Grace**. **God is nurturing your life** and **this church**. I wonder **where we will go from here?** Where ever it is, thanks be to God. Amen.