

**“ON THE GROWING EDGE”**  
**2) “Rooted in the Past”**

Hebrews 12: 1-2 / Matthew 13: 31-32 / Mark 4: 26-29

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In July of 1957, Elvis was a rising star with such hits as, “Jail House Rock, Teddy Bear, and All Shook Up.” The Beatles were still school boys, and the Milwaukee Braves, behind the sterling pitching performance of Lew Burdette, took game seven of the World Series from the New York Yankees.

It was also during that momentous year that a church service was held at the San Ramon Valley Funeral Home on Front Street in Danville. A total of 89 people attended what was the first worship service of the San Ramon Valley Methodist Church. The seeds for this new beginning had been sown in countless conversations over previous months and even years among the people of the First Methodist Church of Walnut Creek. With the blessing and support of that faith community, thirty three adults and \_\_\_\_\_ children were commissioned to start a new church in the rural area of an Alamo Walnut orchard.

On July 7, 1957, that dream became a reality and a new church was “officially” born—in a funeral home no less! There is no record that any of the dead were raised on that particular Sunday morning, but the seeds of the Gospel of Jesus Christ were planted among those who worshipped. With the passing of time, those seeds would take root and begin to grow in some surprising ways.

Property was purchased and a walnut orchard was transformed into a new church campus, complete with a chapel for worship—what is now our Fireside Room. Then, in 1961, a new sanctuary was completed—this sanctuary—and the rest is history—a history of some 58 years of making a creative contribution to the lives of many, including those of us who gather here this morning.

And to think that it all started with the “seed” of an idea that grew into the “root” of a plan that became the “sprout” of a building that would, in time, become a large “tree” that would enable the “birds of the air” to come and nest in its branches. As I suggested last week, this is often the way that the kingdom of heaven emerges in our midst. It arrives not with parades and bands and fireworks, but with a certain subtlety that often unfolds in the little and seemingly insignificant ways that some many people fail to notice.

From the tiniest seed imaginable, says Jesus, comes the largest of shrubs. This morning, as we consider this remarkable description of the nature of the kingdom of heaven, we are thinking about the ways in which we, as a congregation, have, likewise, grown in subtle, surprising and significant ways.

It would, of course, only be fitting to hear from some of these early seed sowers as they reflected upon those challenging and exciting times. These excerpts are taken, once again, from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Video.

The trouble with taking this approach, of course, is that there is never enough time to hear from everyone. Nevertheless, these comments do provide a sense of the challenges and opportunities that these early members faced. I know that we all feel a debt of gratitude to people like, Dale and Daphne Kimble, Felicia Hilliard, Hillary and Linda Forsey, Barry and Marilyn Scott, Dorothy Brose, Alice and Myron Reynolds—to name a few of the pioneers.

In our second parable of the morning, Jesus suggests that the Kingdom of God is “as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.”

Jesus is suggesting that invariably, there is a mystery to the way the growth of God’s kingdom takes place. It is not often something we notice in the moment or can see with the naked eye. It just happens and we become aware of it only in retrospect.

I have a plant in my office that was given to me as a welcoming gift when I was appointed as pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Los Gatos in 1984. It was about two feet high at the time and I placed it on a coffee table and watered it occasionally. Over the years, I have continued to water this plant as it sat on the counter in my office. Today, that two foot plant has become a ten foot plant—one that has literally hit the ceiling and is now tilting toward the center of the room. In all the time it has been there, however, I never saw it grow. I never saw actually inch upwards. But today, I can see that it has grown in ways that I never could fully appreciate.

In looking back at the witness of these early founders and members of our church, it’s not likely that any one of them could fully appreciate the significance of their action in the moment. They were just busy living their lives and doing what they believed to be the right thing to do in growing a new church. There were tight times and tough times, times in which it must have felt as if they were merely spinning their wheels in their efforts to move forward.

But like that farmer in the parable that Jesus tells, we are able to fully appreciate the impact of their witness and the significant difference that it has made. While the specific moments of growth may remain something of a mystery to us, we can, nevertheless, give witness to the growth that has taken place.

- Thirty three adult members would, in time, become 1150 members.
- A funeral home would be replaced by our present campus and facilities.
- A dream would become a reality.

A tiny seed would become the largest of shrubs, a tree that today, enables the birds of the air to nest in its branches.

There's the old story about the little boy who loved to ride upon his father's shoulders.

One day as they were enjoying this father-son ritual by walking around the front yard of their home. As they approached the hedge that separated their yard from their neighbors, the little boy peered over the hedge to see their neighbor, Mr. Jackson, looking up at him from a kneeling position as he weeded his flower bed. Feigning surprise and amazement, Mr. Jackson looked up at the boy and exclaimed, "Johnny, I can't believe how tall you are getting!" But Johnny was determined to set the record straight. "O, Mr. Jackson," he said, "not all of this is me!"

In a similar fashion, we might say that "not all of this is us!" For we are riding on the shoulders of those good and faithful stewards—some of whom have now gone on before us. Stewardship, of course, is a somewhat loaded word. In the hearing of some, it means only one thing—the request for financial support. And while the need to raise money to support an annual budget is a part of what stewardship is all about, it is about so much more than that. (Stewardship

By definition, a steward is one who takes care of that which has been entrusted to him or her.

A steward is a trustee, commissioned with the task of using the available resources thoughtfully and carefully.

How blessed we have been to have inherited the legacy of stewardship left to us by the founding members of this congregation. For truly, the value of their legacy cannot be captured merely by the sizeable amount of money that they invested. It's true that they invested a lot of their financial resources to provide a solid foundation upon which to build. But, more than that, their legacy is one that is rich with energy, passion, purpose and joy. In the video that we saw, you could hear that in their voices. You could see that in their faces. They were moved by a vision and were willing to do anything necessary to make that vision come true...and that is precisely what they did.

Now, the years have come and gone. Only a few of our charter members are still alive. The baton has been passed to us and we must decide how we will run this leg of the journey. In our lesson from the Book of Hebrews, this morning, the writer offers a marvelous metaphor for us to consider.

After listing what might be called, "the honor roll" of the saints, the writer then reminds his readers, past and present, that they are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses of those who have gone before and then challenges them to run with perseverance the race that has been set before them.

In closing, this morning, I would like to simply echo that reminder and that challenge. We are in this very moment, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, the lives of men and women, boys and girls, who have, through their stewardship, made our present reality possible. We do, in fact, ride upon their shoulders.

Now, it is our turn to take what we have been given and invest it well—to “pay it forward,” not only for ourselves in this present moment of time, but for those who will, one day, inherit our legacy. Let us, therefore, run with perseverance, the race that is before us...looking to Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Amen.