

Planters and Waterers

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The world comes at us fast these days.

I have not been on this planet so long, but I have heard again and again my elders reflect that things just seem to happen faster now than they once did. The pace of change is accelerating. Every crisis seems bigger. Every day more full.

Here is just one example. Smartphones. 70% of Americans own one. Our lives have become restructured around them. The way we work. The way we find our way through the world. How we communicate.

Do you remember what a pain it was to text on those old T9 touchpads. Where you had to push the 7 button 4 times to get the letter S?

Do you remember having to decide if it was worth bringing your camera to this event or that? Am I going to lug it around all day?

To me, it seems like ages ago.

But it wasn't.

It's been about 9 years since the first iPhone came out.

9 years. Not so long by just about any other measure. But in that time the logistics of our day to day lives have changed dramatically.

And of course it's not just phones. The whole world seems to be changing pretty quickly. And those changes are reported to us at a feverish pace, even the 24 hour news cycle seems slow now compared to the instant feedback of social media.

So when my news feed gets too overwhelming, I have a little place I go to get away from it all.

The historical room.

It's the room upstairs that houses all this church's historical documents and artifacts. We have handwritten letters from some of this church's earliest pastors. Old sermons. Dusty old ledger books that record baptisms, weddings, and funerals all the way back to the 1800's.

I think I like being around all that old stuff because it helps me zoom out. And see the day, or the week, that I am standing in for its place in an institution that has stood here for centuries.

And then I remember that God has walked with God's people through times of triumph and trial for millennia.

And then I remember that in God's eyes, this moment rests in the context of eons.

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The apostle Paul had a problem in Corinth. Paul had started a new church there in the city, he had come and taught the people the simple truth of God's love for them. He, by his own recollection, proclaimed nothing to them but Christ, and him crucified.

And once the operation was up and running, Paul left town. As was his custom, to begin again somewhere else.

And in his wake came Apollos.

Apollos is remembered in the book of Acts in this way.

“A native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when the elders heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.”

So it seems Apollos had a way with words. He could give them the razzle-dazzle. And some people began to feel as if Paul had not given them the real good stuff.

So much so that around the church in Corinth some people begin to say. “I am with Apollos.” and others “I am Paul’s guy.”

Paul gets wind of this and fires off a letter to say:

“I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready. Listen to you quarrel! For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are

you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

The Saturday afternoon before I was installed as the Pastor of this church, I drove over to Milton Cemetery to visit the grave of Rev. Peter Thatcher. The very first pastor of this church. He was born in Salem on July 18, 1651. After graduating from Harvard he briefly served a church in Marblehead. That is until a group of eight men rode up to Marblehead in order to ask him to come to Milton to serve their newly founded church as it's first Pastor.

He wrote in his journal, “I was persuaded so far to comply with all as to remove my self and my family to his place, so I might the more clearly discern and faithfully follow divine guidance and direction in any future settlement amongst you, or remove from you accordingly

as God should unite ye heart of ye church and Congregation unto me and mine.”

In other words, “let’s give it a try.”

And he did. And indeed his heart, and the Congregation’s were united.

He was installed as the minister of this church on June 1, 1681. He was 29 years old.

He wrote in his journal that day just one line, “Today I was ordained (though most unworthy) pastor of the church in Milton.”

I have come to feel a great affinity for Rev. Thatcher. And I wanted to visit with him, before I, though most unworthy, was installed as your 23rd Pastor.

And I stood there over his grave, where he is buried right along side the next 4 pastors of this church, and this scripture that we read this morning popped right into my head.

Standing there made me think of Paul and Apollos, and all the other faithful people whose names have been forgotten to history who built and sustained that brand new church in Corinth.

Planters and waterers each one. Looking to God to give the growth.

I stand in that historical room sometimes and think about the many trials that this church has weathered. Wars and pandemics, famine and depression, fire and floods, grief at untimely losses.

And still they came, and planted, and watered.

They tended to this community of faith like dutiful farmers, awaking each day to do the simple work. Plant and water.

Sing and pray. Host coffee hour. Join a committee.

Plant and water.

Visit the sick. Paint the hallway. Vote on the budget.

Plant and water.

Demand justice. Stand up for the poor. Proclaim the gospel.

Plant and water.

And the truly amazing thing to me, is that they did it for us. They could never have imagined our world. But they trusted, they believed deep down, that no matter what came to be there would be a need for God's people to gather, a need for the truth to be proclaimed, a need for a place to pray, and to sing.

They trusted, they believed deep down, that if they planted, and watered. God would give the growth God needed, for our sake, and for the sake of the world.

And now its our turn.

Not to be the smartest people in the world. Not to dazzle anyone. Not to have the one great idea that is going to solve everything.

For what is Apollos? and what is Paul? And what are you? And what am I?

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Acts

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

“Why didn’t Paul give us the good stuff”