

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 3:6–7

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

September always feels like a new beginning in the life of the church.

Summer has its own rhythm, but then suddenly September arrives. Programs restart. Committees and teams become active again. The calendar fills up. People return from holidays. And before long we are looking toward Thanksgiving, then Advent, then Christmas.

But before we rush into everything that is ahead of us, I think it is important for us as elders to stop for a moment and notice what God has already been doing among us.

Because there is a lot for which we can give thanks.

Our summer worship attendance was strong. And, for the first time in a long time, we could worship through the heat of July and August in genuine comfort because of the new air conditioning.

That may sound like a practical thing - and it is - but it is also ministry.

It made our building more welcoming for our own congregation, and it has opened new possibilities for how this church can serve and partner with our community.

We saw that very clearly with the concert last weekend. It was an enormously positive evening. The church was full. People were excited to be here. There was a wonderful spirit in the room, and it reminded us that this building can be a place where our wider community gathers and where relationships are formed.

We also saw tremendous life through Vacation Bible Camp this summer. It was so well done, and it involved a remarkable number of children and volunteers.

And that is part of a much bigger story.

Our ministry with children and youth continues to grow under Julia's leadership. Just last Friday there were **16 young people in Grades 6 through 8** gathered here.

Sixteen.

That is something worth noticing.

It is easy in church life to become focused on the things that are difficult, the problems that need solving, the decisions that need making, or the things we wish were happening faster.

But sometimes we need to stop and simply recognize where there is life.

Where there is growth.

Where seeds are being planted.

Where people are watering those seeds.

And where God is clearly at work.

Paul writes, *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."*

That is an important word for us as elders.

Our calling is not to manufacture growth.

Our calling is not to somehow force the church into becoming what we think it ought to be.

Our calling is to be faithful.

To plant.

To water.

To encourage.

To nurture.

To pay attention.

And ultimately to trust God with the growth.

And that seems particularly important as we enter this fall.

We have a New Members Course coming this Sunday.

We have growing ministries with children and youth.

We have community partnerships that are developing.

We have a congregation that continues to worship, serve, care for one another, and reach beyond itself.

And we are entering an important season through **New Beginnings**.

Over the next few months we are going to be asking some significant questions together about who we are, where God may be calling us, and what the future of First Presbyterian Church might look like.

And perhaps that process begins not by asking, “*What do we need to create?*”

Perhaps it begins by asking,

“What is God already growing among us?”

Where do we see life?

Where do we see people responding?

Where do we see relationships forming?

Where do we see new possibilities emerging?

And then, as elders, how do we faithfully nurture those things?

There is much work ahead of us this fall.

But I hope we enter it encouraged.

God has been at work here.

People have planted.

People have watered.

And God is making it grow.

LET US PRAY.

Gracious God,

Thank you for the life we see within this congregation.

Thank you for every person who has planted seeds of faith, every person who has watered them, and every person who has quietly and faithfully served.

Thank you for our children and young people.

Thank you for our volunteers, our staff, our musicians, our leaders, and all those who offer their gifts.

Thank you for the ways this church continues to worship, care, serve and reach into our community.

As we enter this new season, give us wisdom as elders.

Help us to notice where you are already at work.

Give us courage to nurture what you are growing.

Give us humility to remember that this is your church, not ours.

And lead us faithfully into the future you are preparing.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.