

## **Thanks for the Memories**

**Colossians 1: 1-14**

**Rev. Barbara A. Frey**

**June 30, 2013**

I know that you are wondering what's up with all these apples that you received as you came in this morning.

I cut open an apple for the children during the Time for Children. We saw a star and lots of seeds. We talked about the fact that apple seeds are not good things to eat, but they are good for growing apple trees—trees that can produce more apples, more fruit! The most important thing for a seed to do is to grow into a tree that can produce good fruit. The good news of Jesus is like a seed, and the apostle Paul saw this seed bearing fruit and growing in the whole world (Colossians 1:6).

Imagine the good news of Jesus growing like a seed inside you, and helping you to create good fruit. Paul says this fruit is "every good work," "growth in the knowledge of God," being "made strong," and "joyfully giving thanks" (verses 10-12). Each of you can name some of the good fruits you see in your own lives as the good news of Jesus grows inside you—good fruits that appear in your daily lives, in your playing and working and helping other people. These good fruits can be seen in our own church community, through Habitat for Humanity, Food for Friends and Covenant to Care. Seeds sometimes take a while to germinate and take hold, so planting seeds involves patience and trust. Seeds are valuable and are the beginnings for endless possibilities when the fruit develops.

This apple and all this talk about seeds remind me of that camp song we often sing before meals. I know many of you know the "Johnny Appleseed" grace:

*Oh, the Lord is good to me. And so I thank the Lord  
For giving me the things I need: The sun and the rain and the apple seed;  
The Lord is good to me.*

Indeed, the Lord has been good to me! Planting me in your midst, the Lord knew that First Church was a rich, fertile place to grow and nurture a not-so-young but newly ordained pastor. You and I might not have realized that in November 1999, when I arrived. You welcomed me well. Before my official first day, I met the women of the church at a Guild harvest luncheon. I also received a terrific welcome from the high schoolers in the youth group who were hoping that I would be their faith partner for some mission activities and some fun. Great memories! I remember my first apple pie lock-in during my first month here, when I still needed a map to find my way around this building. No elevator then! I remember mission trips to Baltimore, West Virginia, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., and the unique, intergenerational mission trip to Kentucky with teenagers and the "big kids," which was their fond nickname for their adult partners—a different place and mission each year. I remember recreating the space on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor for a new way of teaching. I also remember my first hospital visit when John Punt was born to Laura and Doug. There are so many memories!

When I first came here, you might say I was a healthy seed, equipped with the nutrients, ready to be planted in your church school and youth groups and in all areas of your parish life. So, grow and prosper we did, because this was the right place for me and for you. Together, we

created good fruit. In Colossians, Paul says this fruit is "every good work," through growth in "the knowledge of God," being "made strong," in Christ Jesus and "joyfully giving thanks." I know that you will continue to create "good fruit."

For the scripture today, I chose the letter to the Christians in Colossae, (a town in Asia Minor), written in the first century by Paul and Timothy. I chose Colossians because its church was a community of faithful Christians working together that reminds me of your commitment here at First Church. The church in Colossae was struggling in some ways, and it had its challenges. The seed of faith there, much like the apple seed, experienced highs and lows—lots of sun and good weather conditions, but there were some cloudy days mixed in with lots of rain. The seed not only survived, but it thrived.

We thank God for you, they said, "for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints" (Colossians 1:4). They rejoiced that their mutual friend Epaphras "has made known to us your love in the Spirit." Paul did not start the church, nor had he ever been there, but he had heard about the place, and he decided to go there in a virtual way, by writing a letter. We also sometimes choose places to travel or visit because the seed has been planted by what we have "heard or read about these places." The words of others are powerfully persuasive in defining what we perceive about another person or place.

Like Paul, I had heard about First Church. I had never been here, but I had heard great things about the place. You see, I had been traveling in Christian Education circles for many years. My predecessor here, Rev. Lee Moore, was both a colleague and a mentor. I remember that First Church was always in the forefront of Christian Education. It was among the first to welcome children to The Table for Communion. You also were one of the first to adopt a Safe Church Policy. The list of progressive and positive things goes on and on. Paul was a realist, and he knew that the church at Colossae was not perfect. It was dealing with problems in theology and philosophy, but still Paul heard some good things, and that was what he remembered and that was what he was so proud of. Paul had heard: "They have been transferred from darkness to light; they have been redeemed and forgiven. Because of this they have been changed." (verses 13-14)

Just as God provided for the Colossians, God also gives us the power, strength, wisdom, and determination to be the people of God in every area of our lives.

You and I can name some of the good fruits we see in our own lives as the good news of Jesus grows inside us—good fruits that appear in our daily lives, in our playing and working and helping other people. Together, we can name some of the good fruits we see in our own lives as a faith community committed to developing Christ-like relationships with each other here in this place and beyond. I want to name a few of those good fruits that will be part of my memories of this faith community, which has also been my extended family.

First of all, you embrace one of the core values of the UCC every time you say and live out the words with which we begin worship. Please say them with me: "Whoever you are." Second, I notice that many of you are wearing a name tag because you are trying to know each other by name and hoping to make a deeper connection with each other. All ages work together here. I have found that this church community, with the reciprocal caring that comes with belonging, as in a family, can be a great solace in the high times and especially in the low times of life. We rejoiced together when I baptized my three year-old grandson in this

chancel, and at so many other baptisms. Next year's confirmation class is full of young persons that I baptized. Their seeds of faith will be nurtured by all of you as you guide and support them. You encouraged me when I wanted to create a Bible times marketplace; Andy Taylor and Jimmy Quinn agreed to make the stalls, even though I didn't have a pattern and had only a picture. Lots of other folks bought into the idea, too, especially my colleague Dawne, and together we created something special. Another adventurous idea was the children's butterfly quilt hanging on the wall above the north door, but this angel quilt that was the children's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary gift was an even greater leap of faith that certain adult angels made into a reality. I am thankful for all the seeds that we planted and nurtured together, and for the joy we had when we could harvest the fruits.

These past almost 14 years here at West Hartford have flown by. During my exit interview, I was asked to name one thing that I would miss most; I hardly paused before answering *THE PEOPLE*. I will miss all of you! I am so thankful for all of the wonderful memories of *YOU* that I will carry with me.

Just as Paul is enthusiastic about what is happening in the newly formed church at Colossae with its members who are vital and active, "bearing fruit and growing" I am enthusiastic about your future together. Paul's reminder to them is a good reminder for you, also. He reminds them of the importance of person and place. You are holy, he says, and he addresses them as brothers, implying that they are like family. As for place, you are in Christ, whether in Colossae or in West Hartford. Paul suggests that the church is able to thrive both in Christ and in the world because of the power of faith, hope and love (v. 4). The love reflected in Colossae and here in First Church comes from God and is a sign that God is at work among you. I have seen that love reflected here in you. As I depart from you, I share with you here at First Church, who are Christ's followers for today and for the future, these words from Paul to Christ's early followers in Colossae:

*I will not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father.* (verses 9-11) Amen.

### **Benediction**

The seeds of gospel truth have been planted in you. Go now to share your faith in Jesus and your love for each other, so that the gospel might grow in you and bear fruit throughout the world. May you be filled with the wisdom of God, the power of Christ and the patience of the Spirit, now and forever. Alleluia. Amen.

© Rev. Barbara A. Frey, all rights reserved

**First Church of Christ Congregational**  
United Church of Christ  
12 South Main Street, West Hartford, Connecticut 06107  
860.233.9605 [www.whfirstchurch.org](http://www.whfirstchurch.org)