

Look around you – look at these trees.

Mighty, majestic, offering shade and relief and places for birds.  
Each one of these began as a seed, an acorn, a seed carried on the wind  
which took root somewhere as circumstances were right for it to  
grow and flourish and grow into the purpose for which it was made.

Our churches were once seeds – just imagine these 350-year-old churches  
with their old and lovely buildings were once an idea in the mind of a settler  
hungry for community, hungry for connection to God;  
a yearning among a group of people seeking a place to gather and worship  
and baptize their children and become a community.

If these trees could talk I'm sure they could tell us of years of flourishing  
followed by years of adversity; of times the punishing winds came and  
twisted their very trunk around;  
of seasons of sun and breezes and rains which brought sweet nurture  
and the roots reaching into the river helped them grow strong and healthy.

And if all those who have been part of our Christ Churches over the years  
could speak, they would tell similar stories, seasons of growth and vibrancy,  
seasons of stagnation and conflict, seasons of loss and hardship,  
seasons of harvest and hope.

We've experienced many of these things just in the last year.

And here we are, two communities,  
two trees who have also learned to grow together.  
We have been planted for a purpose, a purpose which keeps unfolding.  
And we have seasons – I want to see fruit all the time,  
but not all the time is a season for fruit-bearing.

But even when no fruit is visible, the processes that result in fruit continue.  
And we need to be attentive to those processes,

- ◆ our “root health” – spiritual growth;
- ◆ our “trunk strength” – the health of our systems;
- ◆ our “branch extension” – how effectively we reach out and beyond.

I'm developing a picture of our identity and mission with a tree as its central symbol – this will be a way for us to see at a glance all of who we are.

The **root system** will represent all our spiritual growth activities for children, youth and adults – if we're not nurtured in the Spirit we will wither.

As Psalm 1 says of those who know God's word:

*They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.*

The **trunk** will stand for the worship life which supports our mission, and the bark our systems of administration, finance, buildings that keep our energies flowing God-ward.

The **branches** will show all the ways we reach out into our communities, to engage people in knowing God's love, to offer tangible evidence of that love in ministries of feeding, healing and justice.

The **leaves** will represent ministries of healing and pastoral care –

As it says in Ezekiel and Revelation about trees planted by the river of God:  
*Their leaves will be for the healing of the nations.*

And the **fruit** is all the outcomes from our life together, things we can see and name and celebrate. And the **nuts** are all of us!

And we are also working to develop a joint logo with two trunks arising from a single one – trees are us!

Each of us is an intergral part of these trees we are as churches.

The spiritual vitality of the tree is intimately connected to the spiritual health of each part. I pray we will each be actively engaged in growing in faith and inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives – the more we are activated by the Spirit, the more we know our spiritual gifts and use them to build up our churches.

We have been planted for a purpose, long ago.

Listen again to the prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God:

*I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar;  
I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs;  
I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.  
On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it,  
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar.*

The purpose of churches is to equip the saints to bear God's transforming love into the world. They are not clubs or social work societies, museums or refuges. They are incubators of fruit and life, always growing,  
And like trees, always reaching toward heaven.

Listen to another prophet, Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.*

We are called to be those oaks of righteousness,  
God's planting to display God's glory.

We may have started life here in this place as tiny seeds...

but our future is already written in eternity, to display God's glory.

From here to eternity. **Amen.**

### **Mark 4:26-34**

He also said, "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. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.