

Would you say that you have a green thumb, that is you have success in helping a tree or a plant (whether it be an indoor or outdoor plant) grow? Or are you more like the person who brings a beautiful blooming plant home from the store only to find it wilted, if not dead, in your house in less than a week’s time? Growth is a part of life. As humans we desire to grow in height when we are a child. We plant trees and gardens with the goal that such will grow. Businesses start up with the idea of growing the business. And we in the church are no different, we want the church to grow.

If we are not growing, we are dying as we keep in mind that growth is not always measured by height but also by health. When it comes to the church, for example, God may not bless us with more members and yet He still expects us to grow. So on this MLC Sunday we want to emphasize the fact we in God’s church, by God’s doing, **“WE ARE ALL ABOUT GROWING IN CHRIST.”** “We Are About Growing As Individuals.” And, “We Are About Growing As A Ministry.”

Connected to growth is knowledge. On the individual level what is it that we know about the Christ? Well we know that Jesus had to come to this earth of His because there was a huge problem. The problem is recorded for us in Genesis 3. This problem is still around in our day, and it will be until the end of time. The problem is sin, not just the sin Adam and Eve were led into by the fallen angel known by us as the devil, our sins too are a problem (such as the sins we confessed earlier in our worship). Our sin not only impacts us individually, it also impacts the people around us. Sin needed to be put in its place, and so Jesus had to come from His home in heaven to this earth as only He was the One able to deal effectively with sin.

The fact that sin is still very prevalent in our day is not on Jesus or God the Father, that fact rests all on us. God has put sin in its place through Jesus, we though like to get it back out from its place more than we care to admit. And so we are reminded time and time again about what Jesus did to put sin its place for us and for all. He lived the life you and I and all people are to live but cannot due to sin in our hearts from conception on. He took the perfect life He lived in our place to His death on a cross as death was the only way able to make full and satisfactory atonement for not only our sin but also the sins of the entire world population ... that is a vast amount of sin paid for, is it not?

The empty tomb of Jesus confirms the fact Jesus was successful from the cross in making the payment in full for our sins. We, through Jesus, are able to stand forgiven before a holy God. We do not have to live in fear of God for we have come to know and believe what has been done for us through Jesus. Can we hear this good news too much? If we don’t hear it often, we stop growing. Growth in one area for sure we cannot afford not to grow is in our relationship with God through the Christ as the Holy Spirit has brought us into that knowledge and relationship. The Prophet Jeremiah’s phrase regarding God’s mercies being new every day is what we need to keep in mind for every day sin comes knocking on the door of our heart hoping to take center place, but by God’s mercies sin does not get what it desires.

The way for us individually to keep growing in Christ is not all that complicated; yet, we can make the process complicated as we fill up our calendars with other priorities. Growth does not have to be complicated because God has given us the tools to grow spiritually, the Means of Grace, that is, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. It is through these Means God helps us grow. Being here in worship then is an investment. We want investments to grow. It is no different with the investment God has made in us. As we hear and read His Word and use the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as Christ directed we will grow.

The worship service is just one important way for us to grow. Bible Study with our brothers and sisters in Christ is another valuable way to grow as we can make deeper inroads into the Word of God. And just as eating once a week would not cut it for us, the more we are in the Word during the week keeps the growth pattern going. We will not be able to get to point on this side of heaven when we can say we know it all when it comes to the Word; however, the more we are connected the better we can hold our own in discussions with people of other faiths or who have no faith. Such discussions can sharpen our faith as we keep the Word as our focal point.

Yes, we are all about growing in Christ and the when to grow is not limited just to Sundays. As we grow individually we are also in a better position to grow as a ministry. One of the reasons God has put us together in this place is to grow one another. The experience one of us has gone through can be of benefit to someone else who is now having to face the same or a similar experience. Satan does not give up on any one of us just because we part of the church; he might even be working harder on us because he knows it is not as easy to pick someone off if they are connected to Christ through the church.

But not every church can be considered a safe haven, can they? The Bible warns us about false teachers with their false teachings. In the verses leading up to our sermon text the Apostle Peter is warning believers to be alert to teachings distorted or made up which are contrary to the Word of God. In the church we can encourage one another on what to be on the alert for and then encourage one another to not fall prey, and if one of us does fall prey we have each other to encourage a coming back to the truth.

There is also the temptation as we want our ministry to grow that we rely on personalities and or methods as a way to grow the church. People don't want to hear God's Law so let's just push that teaching of God aside. People want to hear that they can do something to earn God's favor and thus make it into heaven so let's just ignore the purpose of the cross of Christ. As we grow in the Word we together will see the errors some other churches and individuals are speaking. If we are not growing in the Word, we may not recognize the errors of others and so fall prey ourselves.

Would you say the world is knowledgeable when it comes to what God wants for them and from them? What does the world know about sin? What does the world know about what God has done about sin and why He has done this? Would you say the world knows how to glorify God? Your answers speak to another reason why we are here in this church and why we ask God to help us spiritually grow not just individually but also that He grows the church through our witness efforts. People are not going to come to know the Savior God on their own, they need to be shown the way. Who better to show them than you? Sure there are challenges to outreach but we grow through them. Again, our outreach efforts may not be bearing as much fruit as we would like to see, the growth of the church is in God's hand ... yet our role as His ambassadors is invaluable. Even through rejection of the Gospel message which we go out to share, we can grow and any seed planted may just take root.

This is why it is also important to keep in mind that we are not alone in this ministry and in our God-given desire to grow the ministry. God provides His church with full time workers ... pastors, teachers, staff ministers ... to work alongside His people for the purpose of growing the church (again, growth is not always #'s). Each one of us is a part of the Universal Priesthood, that is, each one of us can talk about the Savior, we can pray to God for self and others, we can do more ... yet it is God Himself who has given His church people to nurture His people and to help grow His church. Those whom God calls to serve His people in the churches and schools are part of what we call the public ministry, pastors and teachers and staff ministers acting on behalf of and for but not in the place of God's people.

We have a training system for these to be public servants in the ministry which does not have to take a backseat. Martin Luther College in MN serves as the home site for the training of future called workers in the public ministry. There is growing which takes place there as enrolled men and women grow in faith as they grow in Bible knowledge during those years at College. The main purpose of MLC is to train these people God moves to consider full time ministry so that they can serve Him and His people with confidence knowing they have spent a great amount of in and out of class time, and need to keep spending time, in the Word.

Not only are these men and women equipped with training in the Word, they also are given the tools to make an impact in the area of general education. God calls us to be good managers of His gifts, this includes not just the gift of His Word but of all that He has created ... the study and teaching of math and science and history are part of that good management. God calls us to be good managers of His gifts, this includes those who serve in the public ministry. So let us pray for and encourage God's people called to serve us in the public ministry so that together we can grow in the way God wants us to grow. Pray for Martin Luther College, that our College remain faithful to the Word and to the mission of our College based on the Word ... to train and equip people who go out and train and equip others for works of service as we seek to grow our ministry.

So yes, we are all about growing in Christ individually and as a church gathered to do ministry. And we are all about growing in Christ at MLC so that by God's grace we will continue to graduate men and women who will be able to work alongside us in our fields of labor, who will be faithful to God's Word and help us remain faithful to that Word. Pray for our called workers and encourage men and women to consider serving God's people in the full time ministry. MLC stands ready to help them and us grow, to grow in Christ. That dear friends is what we are all about.