

Sunday Column: Rooted in Christ, Grounded in Prayer

Week 2 – Living Our Vision through Worship and Shared Life

Faith Behind Our Vision (Theological Themes)

- *Who Christ is and how we live in Christ – Christology*
- *Life with God through prayer – Christian spirituality*
- *Growing in love through God's grace – Sanctification*
- *Every person's God-given dignity – The image of God (Imago Dei)*
- *Loving our neighbors through listening, service, and hospitality – Christian ethics*
- *Receiving grace through Baptism and Communion – Sacramental theology*
- *The church as a community of shared life and responsibility – Ecclesiology*

“Rooted in Christ and grounded in prayer, we embody dignity and neighborliness through listening, service, hospitality, and shared life.”

The second sentence of our vision begins with what sustains us: our relationship with Christ. Colossians describes a life rooted and built up in him, growing in faith and thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7). Through his life, death, and resurrection, we come to know God's love and learn how to respond. In the Gospels, Jesus gives people his attention, shares meals, and receives hospitality. He welcomes people others overlook and calls his followers to love their neighbors. To be rooted in Christ is to allow his way of relating to people to shape our own.

Prayer draws us into that learning. We bring our plans and concerns before God, acknowledging that we do not see the whole of another person's life. We ask for patience to listen and willingness to have our understanding changed. Paul's invitation to persevere in prayer with watchfulness and thanksgiving speaks to this practice (Colossians 4:2). Being grounded in prayer means returning to God throughout our work, seeking guidance when we are uncertain and offering thanks for what we could not have anticipated. In our Wesleyan tradition, this growth in love is part of *sanctification*: God's grace continuing to form us in love for God and neighbor.

Our vision uses the word “embody” because these convictions need expression in our actions. Dignity begins with the belief that every person bears God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). We honor that dignity when we take someone's experience seriously and treat them with care, regardless of whether they are familiar to us or can offer anything in return. Neighborliness brings this responsibility into the places we share. It asks us to know the people around us and enter relationships in which we can both offer help and receive it.

Our Community Easter Service helps me understand how these commitments come together. In earlier years, people gathered for a sunrise service. When the resort stopped offering the free tram, that arrangement changed. Beginning in 2025, the resort provided space for Easter worship, allowing us to continue gathering the community around the good news of Christ's resurrection.

That year, we also celebrated the baptism of Hunter, Amanda and Charlie's son and Vicky and Paul's grandson. Afterward, a couple of participants told me how beautiful they found the service and how grateful they were to have witnessed his baptism. They had come to celebrate Easter and found themselves sharing in the welcome of a child into the life of the church.

Baptism joins us to Christ and his body, the church. Paul connects baptism with Christ's death and resurrection and our calling to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). In the baptism of a child, we see grace reaching toward a person before that child can understand or explain it. The church also makes a commitment: to surround the child with love, nurture faith, and provide a community in which that child can grow. Hunter's baptism gave "shared life" a particular name and face. The responsibility for nurturing faith extended beyond his family to the church that welcomed him.

The participants' gratitude reminded me that witnessing a baptism can renew our understanding of our own place in that community. We hear promises about love and care, and we are invited to consider how we will help keep them. Shared life takes time. It includes remembering those promises as a child grows and making room for that child's questions and gifts.

In 2026, approximately 140-150 community members, visitors, and resort guests gathered for Easter worship in the ballroom. Looking out at the gathering, I could see how many people had come. Only through conversations afterward did I begin to understand what had brought some of them there.

One woman told me she had come down from Anchorage to spend Easter weekend with a friend. She had come to Girdwood for that visit, and attending our Easter service became an unexpected part of her weekend. Afterward, she shared how much she had enjoyed the worship and the message. She also specifically mentioned her appreciation for the open Communion table.

That detail stayed with me. Paul describes the bread and cup as a sharing in Christ and connects our sharing of one bread with our belonging to one body (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). In our United Methodist practice, we extend Christ's invitation through an open Communion table. Through her words, I heard what that invitation had meant to someone receiving it. A

weekend with a friend had become an occasion to hear the Easter message and share in Christ's meal. I found myself giving thanks for the way God can meet us when we have come expecting something else.

Another person told me they were staying at the resort on vacation. They had thought that being away in Girdwood would mean missing Easter worship that year. Then they noticed a post about our service on the resort's social media. There was an Easter service taking place right where they were staying, and they decided to come.

Afterward, they expressed gratitude that they had been able to worship on Easter after all. For those of us preparing the service, sharing an announcement was one task among many. For this person, that announcement answered a question we did not know they were carrying: whether there would be a place for them to celebrate Easter while away from home.

This helped me recognize preparation itself as a form of service. Jesus describes his own ministry in terms of serving others (Mark 10:45). Following Jesus, we give our time and attention to making participation possible. Communicating clearly, preparing the space, and helping people know what to expect are ways of caring for those who will arrive. An ordinary task can address a need we have never heard expressed.

Neither conversation was something we could have planned. Both helped me understand why listening belongs in our vision. We learn what an invitation has meant by making time to hear from those who respond. Listening also leaves us open to hearing what was confusing or difficult. Honoring someone's dignity means allowing their experience to influence our understanding, even when it asks us to reconsider something we have done.

We also received hospitality ourselves. The resort's provision of space and help in sharing the invitation made these gatherings possible. Our neighbors' generosity gave us room to worship, welcome a child in baptism, and share Communion. Hospitality involves making room for others; receiving it teaches us to enter someone else's space with gratitude and care. Our partnership gives neighborliness a concrete expression through the work we do together.

When I pray about our next gathering, these experiences help give shape to my prayer. I ask that we be attentive to the people who arrive and faithful to the promises we make. I give thanks for the neighbors who make room for us. And I pray that, as we prepare to speak about God's love, we will also be ready to listen when someone tells us how they encountered it.