

*It Is a Wonderful Church*  
Pastor Anne Fisher November 3, 2019  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church  
Ephesians 1:11-23

**Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus about what it means to be connected with the people of faith. Imagine if Paul were writing to Oak Grove today. Would his words be the same as to the church in Ephesus?**

**Ephesians 1:11-23**

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And God has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is Christ's body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Today is a big step into the new chapter of Oak Grove. This is your first Pledge Dedication Sunday without your installed Senior Pastor. Yesterday 55 of the leaders of this church met to wrestle with who are we as a church. What is important to us as a church and what kind of leader do we want a pastor to be as we move forward? We are all taking steps toward the future ministry of Oak Grove. It is the time in the church's life when we ask each of you to make a financial estimate of giving for the coming year. The leaders and I approach this season with trepidation. What will our future hold? The answer lies in each of you. Will enough of you catch the vision that Oak Grove will continue to be a strong presence for mission within our denomination as well as in our community and world? Can we be the light that is shining brightly to Bloomington the Twin Cities area and to the world for yet another year? SO many questions how can we support what we want to do?

I am not trying to be overly dramatic but we in the church take things one year at a time. We fund our programs our missions and our staff with what we bring in each year. We are dependent on what you give. This church is blessed with a beautiful building and a new organ all coming from people who gave and gave again. Some who have blessed us with money after they are gone and that helps a lot but it does not cover our programs our staff our ministry. We do not take for granted the gifts that each of you bring to make this church what it is. The work of our church is uncertain of your giving including the type of pastor we call. Not too much pressure!

Therefore, I approach this day with a case of nerves; what if everyone stopped giving... what if Oak Grove Church was not even here? What if...

When I find myself in this state, The Frank Capra Christmas movie, It's A Wonderful Life comes to mind.

It is a story about George Bailey an all around good guy who does the right thing throughout his life. He sacrifices his own dreams for the good of his family, his friends, and the people of Bedford Falls. As the movie begins, things seem to fall apart for George. Mr. Potter the local rich tycoon is bent of destroying George's family's business, which is savings and loan. Through a series of innocent mishaps, George is being investigated and wrongly accused of financial malfeasance. We find George, discouraged and at the end of his

rope. It is then that he realizes that he is worth more dead than alive. At that moment Clarence appears; Clarence Oddbody is an angel second class trying to earn his wings and the way he can do that is to convince George that his life is worth living. At George's darkest moment, he wishes he had never been born. That gives Clarence an idea and he proceeds to show George what the world would have been like if in fact had had never been born.

I wonder, I wonder, what if the world would be like if Oak Grove Presbyterian Church had never been established? Imagine with me that you are feeling like George Bailey, you have been trying to do the right thing for your family and friends, you are part of the church, but the church keeps asking for money. Things keep changing. Why did Pastor Bill have to retire at this time? Things are not like they used to be when the Sunday School was filled to brimming. All this is wearing you down. Things are not turning out as you would expect. In the midst of your despair, imagine me showing up; your very own Clarence Oddbody, transitional pastor, second class who is just trying to earn her transitional wings. How can I convince you that this church, Oak Grove, is worth saving for yet another year?

How would the world be different if Samuel and Gideon Pond remained in Connecticut and had not gone to that revival meeting that inspired them to head West and eventually here? What if Gideon Pond had not started this church on the banks of the river and called it Oak Grove? What if Belle St Martin never taught Sunday School or played the piano? What if Rev. Knudson went to Milwaukee rather than Minneapolis?

What if you had never heard the word Presbyterian let alone know how to spell it? What if you were never inspired by Presbyterian stories of faith?

We would never know about the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance or One Great Hour of Sharing. Both of these programs help countless people worldwide. If they did not exist, how would the flood and fire victims receive immediate help and aid? What if we were not part of a denomination that sends young adults into areas to serve for two years which is called Volunteers in Mission program? The return with a context from which we all can learn because they have seen the world in eyes of mission and service? What if we did not know about Synod School where Pastor Mary took a

course about Mr. Rogers and taught others the art of mindful stitching. If you still do not know about it, ask her about it!

What would our young people be doing right now? No lock-ins and building relationships, no Habitat for Humanity projects. How many college essays would have to be changed because they never went on a mission trip, and they never had the joy of selfless giving? There would be no inquiring minds asking the tough questions about faith because there would be no one to hear them and respond.

What would Britta, our Youth Director be doing if there were no Sunday morning responsibilities?



If we did not exist, how many people would not have heard the beauty of our organ and choirs. Those children's Christmas Pageants -- where would they be? What would Judy, our terrific Choir Director of over 30 years, be doing on a Sunday morning if Oak Grove was not here?



**Then there is Nancy, she would be out of a job. What could she possibly do with all that organ skill and training?**

**(Nancy...plays take me out to the balls game-----)**

Where would you be right now if this church was not here? Would you be at the Methodist or Lutheran church? There are lots to choose from but it would not be this church and with these folks. What would have been the source of your inspiration?

You would not be part of the Oak Grove family -- neither would your children -- because there would be no Oak Grove family.

Think of the teenagers and young adults who have found their way through Oasis in its 10 years of existence, who would have helped them? A program that was born and nurtured here at Oak Grove Church. No Sheridan Story and Loaves and Fishes would have fewer hands to help. No Alternative Christmas Fair. Bloomington would be lesser if there was not this place on Penn and Old Shakopee.

No laughter at coffee hour. No WOW on Wednesday evening. Patty Nail talked about the meals and the wonderful helpers in the kitchen on Wednesday as one of the most satisfying things that she has done. There would be no delightful memories of Clearwater Camp shared.

What would the lives of some of you who were nurtured in your faith through teachers who gave of themselves every Sunday. Vaughn Sheff shared with us how teaching confirmation not only transforms lives of our young people but the lives of the teachers as well.

Those who were married here, said good-bye to loved ones here, and remain to carry on as a community of faith. The special time we come together for Communion would not even be in our consciousness.

We are a place where the story of faith is shared, told, and lived out. At times, we shine better than others do, but for nearly 165 years, people have faithfully prayed, listened and grew in faith and have been witness to God's love through Jesus Christ.

There would still be compassionate people and those who seek to do the right thing. As individuals, our random acts of kindness can be lost, together as a church; we can live out the faith shared by those who came before.

If the church were not here, there would be no need to ask you for a pledge or a financial commitment that will carry us forward for another year. You would not be bothered with phone calls, emails, and people asking you to serve as an elder or a deacon or to give. That may mean more time for you at

home with fewer meetings. It would mean less things to pray about. It is up to you if that is worth not having Oak Grove Presbyterian in your life.

For me to earn my transitional wings I need each of you to think and pray and to act upon your commitment for the next year. As you do that, I want you to think of a time at Oak Grove that provided you with something beyond yourself of being part of something that you could not have done on your own. It might have been a powerful worship experience, or an inexpressible feeling of joy and peace, a sense of belonging, a sunset up at Clearwater Forest, a hand reaching out to help even when you thought you did not need it. As you think about these times, think how you can be the stewards, the caretakers of this church so that others can have life changing and life rearranging experiences.

Clarence the angel second class not only convinced George Bailey that life was worth living but in fact, George had a wonderful life. As your transitional pastor, second-class, I hope you realize that not only do we have a church worth supporting **but also in fact we have a wonderful church....**

In the movie, Clarence says that every time a bell rings, an angel gets her wings. Every time a pledge is made ... this church gets stronger! It is a wonderful church thanks be to God. Amen.