Sermon :: 18-Oct-2026
Proper 24, Year A

" [for the] message of the [Good News] came to you not in word only
but also in … the Holy Spirit "

There were several years, back in my late elementary and early middle school days, when I spent a *lot* of afternoons knocking on people's front doors. Between the YMCA Indian Guides—a *hopelessly* outdated moniker, I confess, but that's what it was *called* back then*—my dad and I belonged to ... and the Little League team I played on ... it seemed like it was always time to sell *something,* door-to-door: cans of peanut brittle ... cartons of plastic garbage bags ... boxes of pencils. And I *hustled:* I knocked on every door not just on *my* street and the *adjacent* streets ... but every street I could *get* to without having to cross busy Kings Highway, to the north, or busy Pleasant Valley Avenue, to the east. It was a *lot* of houses, and I sold a *lot* of candy and pencils (although I don't remember the garbage bags going over so well).

But I never won any sales contests. Time after time, at least as I recall now, they were won by boys whose fathers—and in *that* time and *that* place, it was mainly *fathers* who worked outside the home—took the sign-up sheets ... or even the tins of candy ... to work with them and invited the whole office ... or teachers' lounge ... or factory floor ... to buy some. *My* dad, however, *didn't*. He believed I needed to do the *work* in order to get the *reward* ... and I'm not ungrateful for the lesson his refusal taught me. But still, at the *time,* it *rankled* me: Whenever the first-place award went a boy whose *dad* had rung up the majority of the *'boy's'* pencil or garbage bag sales, I always wanted to say, "But look at who *really* did the *work* ... who's *actually* responsible for this achievement." Of course, I never *said* it ... but I also never *forgot* it, either.

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During our 2027 stewardship campaign, which *officially* ends today, we've spent the last several Sundays pondering all the ROOM TO GROW we have here at All Souls': all the abundance we enjoy, *from* God; and all the opportunities that lie before us, *in* Christ. And in exploring our hopes ... our dreams ... our visions ... we've largely focused on the work *we* can do—on what your pledge dollars will *enable* and *allow us* to accomplish—on Jesus' behalf, in *this* time and *this* place:

- *We* can hire an associate rector, to serve children, youth and families—especially newcomers ... and to help us organize and launch more small groups for those already here ... and thus, GROW in *numbers*

- *We* can double down on our efforts to serve our sisters- and brothers-in-need: providing them groceries and showers, school supplies and socks, meals and shelter ... and thus, GROW in *service*

- *We* can teach more classes, start more spirituality groups, go off on more retreats ... and thus, GROW in the *Holy Spirit,* and

* Apparently, it's since been renamed "Adventure Guides."

- *We* can invite in our neighbors, here in Point Loma, more *intentionally* ... open our doors more *frequently* ... come alongside them more *supportively* ... and thus, GROW in *witness*

Now, this is a *wonderful* list of *possibilities* ... of *aspirations* ... of *dreams:* both a *catalogue* of our *opportunities* to GROW, and a *plan* to *realize* this potential GROWTH, that, through our *collective* financial support of All Souls' next year, *we're* hoping to *pursue*. In effect: all the 'doors' *we* can 'knock on,' one by one by one, as we explore, capitalize on and make the most of our ROOM TO GROW as All Souls' parish.

But as I sat back and pondered all we've said and shared, dreamed and discussed, over these last several weeks about what *we* can do to GROW ... it dawned on me that we—*I*— haven't said enough about the most *important* factor ... the single biggest *difference*-maker ... the most *potent ally* we have … in our desire to GROW in all the many ways that lie before us: *God*. For not unlike my fellow 'braves' and teammates who took home the sales prizes even though it had been their *fathers* who'd GROWN their tallies of peanut brittle and pencils ... so, too, it is *God,* in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, Who will *ultimately* give GROWTH to All Souls', as *we* knock on door after door after door of *opportunity*.

Indeed, this is the message with which St Paul opens the very first 'church letter' he ever pens, to the Thessalonians: Paul thanks these Christian pioneers, but is very careful to say that the good work they're doing ... the "*work* of *faith* and *labor* of *love* and *steadfastness* of *hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ" ... has come about because *"God* ... has *chosen* you" … *given* you the Good News *"in* the *Holy Spirit"* … and *allowed* "the word of the Lord [to sound] forth *from* you ... in every place your faith in God has become known."

Yes, Paul is *encouraging* and *praising* these early Christians for all the GROWTH they've achieved … all the ROOM their witness has expanded to fill. But … at the *same* time … Paul's also reminding them that it's *God* Who's actually given the *GROWTH* … *Jesus* Who's actually the *seed*—the *crop*—the *Bread* … and the *Holy Spirit* Who's enabled these Christians to *GROW* Him and *feed* Him to their neighbors. The Thessalonians have been dutifully and diligently … and also *faithfully, lovingly* and *hopefully* … knocking on their neighbors' doors, with the most wonderful 'product' to 'sell' that this world has even known. But *behind* the scenes … out of sight, in the spiritual world not visible to the door-knockers … *God* has been making the pitch to people's hearts … stirring their spirits … and signing up their 'purchases.' While the young Christians in Thessalonica have been trundling their little red wagons from one neighbor's door to another … it's the *Holy Spirit* Who's been going to the offices and the factory floors of their *souls* and ringing up record sales! It isn't that God doesn't *need* the Thessalonians to do the ground-work—God certainly *does!* … but it's a *team* effort: The GROWTH the *church* appears to achieve by *itself* … is *actually* the outcome of a beautiful, invisible and holy partnership with the Triune God.

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All Souls' is ready—is *eager*—to *GROW*. We're considering what wares to load into our wagons … planning which routes to take around the neighborhood … identifying which doors to knock on. All this visioning and planning, budgeting and prioritizing, is, at heart, what every stewardship campaign is—or *should* be—about.

But let us hear Paul remind us, as he does the Thessalonians, that the power … the energy … the warmth … the spirit … the love … the grace … *behind* our 'sales'— that will *generate* our GROWTH … *is God*. It is *from* God that we've received the *blessing*_ of All Souls' … and it is *with* God that we will

GROW it, in so many different and amazing ways. And therefore it is *to* God … to God's *potential,* to God's *direction* and to God's *glory* … that we make our pledges for 2027 … so *God* may lead All Souls' as we explore all the wonderful ROOM TO GROW that lies before us, in Christ.

Therefore, I'm now inviting us *all* to consecrate the many pledges that you've so generously made to help All Souls' GROW … to dedicate them to God, Who will *give* the GROWTH.

[(1) move to Altar; (2) make sure new pledges have come forward from the back]

Using the words printed in the bulletin, let us pray:

O Father of all growth,
O Son of all good,
O Spirit of all grace:
We gladly offer to you
these fruits of our labors and blessings of your abundance:
returning to you a small portion of the growth
you have made possible in us.
We freely lift up this bounty to you,
to honor and thank you for all that IS now,
and with vision and hope for all that COULD BE.
Hear us, O Lord, as we solemnly dedicate these pledges
to your work and your will in this place.
Lead, guide and support us, we pray,
in exploring and realizing all the ROOM TO GROW
you have opened before us:
in numbers and in service,
in witness and in Spirit.
Enlighten us and inspire us to do the work,
for we know you are eager to give the growth.
In the Name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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