"We Are Blooming"
Psalm 1:1–3 / Philippians 1:1–6

Today we're celebrating Education Sunday—a special time to recognize and give thanks for the growth we've seen in our children over the past year. We celebrate our Sunday School students for completing another school year, and we especially celebrate Samantha's graduation from college. What a milestone!

Most of us here, let's be honest, graduated from school a long time ago. But that doesn't mean we're done learning. The truth is—we never stop learning. The only difference now is that we don't get a report card at the end of the semester!

There's an old Eastern proverb that goes like this: "Carrying snow to fill a well." Let me share the story behind it. One snowy night, a father took his son out to the village well. He handed the boy a wooden frame used for carrying loads and said, "Look how much snow has fallen. I want you to carry some of it and fill the well." The son wasn't thrilled, but he obeyed. He scooped up the snow, carried it over, and dumped it into the well. Again and again. But as you might expect, the snow just melted into the water. Frustrated, the boy finally said, "Father, this doesn't make any sense! If you want to fill the well, you need to use dirt, not snow. This is a waste of time!"

But the father simply told him to keep going. Days passed. The son finally refused. "Dad, this is foolish. I can't keep doing this. I won't carry snow anymore!" Then the father quietly said, "My son, this is what studying is like when you're young. It can feel like your effort disappears—like nothing is happening. But keep at it. Because learning never ends. And none of it is wasted."

It's a beautiful parable about the lifelong nature of learning. Even when it feels like our efforts melt away or go unnoticed, something deeper is happening. Over time, those quiet, faithful acts—like carrying snow—fill the well of our soul.

The philosopher John Dewey once said, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." Education isn't just about collecting more knowledge or information. If knowledge alone were the goal, we might not need to keep learning—we live in a time when we can simply ask the internet or even an AI and get detailed answers in seconds.

But that's not the heart of learning. You've probably heard the saying: "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad." Real learning shapes how we live. It gives us discernment. It refines how we think, widens our perspective, shapes our character, and helps us grow in wisdom. That's why education is life itself.

And the same is true—perhaps even more so—for Christian education. It's not a class we finish. It's a lifelong journey. In the Methodist tradition, we have a word for this: sanctification—the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ and moving toward Christian perfection. It's a journey of continual spiritual growth and learning. That's why the United Methodist Church emphasizes continuing education—not just for clergy, but for all of us. Because we believe that spiritual maturity and transformation don't come from a single event, but through a lifetime of being reshaped by grace.

So when we come together each Sunday—to worship, to listen to the Word, to reflect on Scripture—our goal isn't just to understand more. It's to be transformed. To become more like Jesus in heart, in mind, and in spirit.

And that's why on Education Sunday, we're not just celebrating academic achievements. We're also celebrating what we've learned and how we've grown—spiritually, relationally, and personally—over the past year.

We Are Blooming

Of course, there's an important difference between general education and Christian education. In general education, the learner is often the center: *I* study, *I* understand, *I* seek to grasp the world. And while that can be empowering and necessary, it also has limits—because when I become the center, it can lead to seeing others, or even nature, as objects to use rather than gifts to cherish.

Christian education is different. Its center is not just *me*, but *God*—the One who has been present from the very beginning. The Reformer John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with this sentence: "True wisdom consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." And he says these two can't be separated—they reflect each other like a pair of mirrors. When we come to know God's greatness and holiness, we also begin to see more clearly our own limitations and need.

But that honest self-awareness doesn't lead us to shame. It leads us back to God. Christian education isn't just about learning *about* the Bible. It's about learning to see ourselves in the light of God's truth— and walking, step by step, into a deeper relationship with the One who knows and loves us fully. And that journey doesn't begin with our effort. It begins with God—the One who "began a good work in us."

In today's reading from Philippians, the apostle Paul writes: "I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ." God is the One who planted the gospel seed in the soil of our hearts. God is the One watering it, nourishing it, and watching over it with love. Some of you may already be blooming—bearing beautiful fruit in faith and in life. Some may feel like your life never really flowered the way you hoped. And some of you may feel like you're still in winter—like nothing's growing at all.

But let me tell you this good news: we are blooming—right now, still—because the Master Gardener has not given up on us. God continues to tend us with grace, with patience, and with love. All of us are blooming in different ways. I visited Linda Reynold recently, and as we talked, we reflected on Asbury. We both agreed—what a blessing it is to be part of this church family. The genuine love for one another, the openness to newcomers, the faith in Christ, and the willingness to serve—Linda told me that this has been the spirit of Asbury for many, many years.

These Christlike qualities didn't appear overnight. It took time. It took care. And it shows—we are blooming. I know a member who recently shared that, after many years, he's excited to read the Bible again and join a book study. That, too, is blooming. A conversation between generations, a reconciled relationship, a renewed hunger for Scripture, a new step toward change—these are the quiet blossoms of grace.

My beloved Asbury family, Even if your life feels like carrying snow to fill a well— Even if the changes feel slow or invisible— God is using every moment. Just like a seed grows in hidden places, God's grace is at work even when we don't see it. The One who planted the seed, the One who waters and tends it, will also bring it to full bloom.

So yes—We are blooming. Because God is still working. Because the stream still flows. Because the Gardener is still tending. Because grace never gives up. Thanks be to God. Amen.