

“Bound Together”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

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The epistle lesson for today is taken from 1 John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 3. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Holy God, give us ears that hear and minds that are open to receive. Cause our hearts to receive as a little child and grant understanding. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Children say remarkable and insightful things—thank you Duncan for that excellent reading. Truly, “Out of the mouths of babes . . .” comes wisdom, and we wonder where it comes from? We wonder and reflect how and why God has made humankind in God’s image; it’s a mystery. We see our fragile nature. We realize how many times we miss the mark of love. We want to have a strong connection with others and embrace them with God’s love, but that doesn’t always happen. Deep down we know—we’re inexplicitly tied and bound together as Christians. We are the body of Christ, and the body of Christ is endowed with the love of God.

In the first verse of chapter three, John speaks of kinship and family. Eight times John uses the phrase “little children” or “my children.” Verse one reads; “See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.” Our commonality isn’t determined by age, color, language, culture, or upbringing.

Our common descent is that we've been spiritually birthed of God. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. We are children of our heavenly Father. When you've wondered what your identity is; this is it! You are a child of God, and love is your vocation because God is love.

If you've recited the *Apostles' Creed* you've read the phrase "communion of saints"; it's #882 in the U.M.H. When we hear the word communion we think of Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. The word "commune" comes from the same root word as community. When we're in community we're together, and it's more than just being physically together because we are like minded. When we're together and experiencing the love of God for each other it's experienced at a very deep strong heart felt level.

And why wouldn't we feel love for each other? We have the same origin. We're spiritually birthed from the heavenly Father. When we participate in Holy Communion again and again we're made stronger with Christ and each other. In communion there's a power of love that's present because we experience Christ's living and loving presence. It should move us to forgive each other—if there's been any kind of disharmony. The love God has for us should affect our love and forgiveness of each other. We all have the same heavenly Father and that makes us kin. But we grow differently at different times. We come from different backgrounds, but this is what makes the body of Christ strong—diversity. We draw our strength from each other, and we want to become like our heavenly Father.

It also seems like a natural response as God's children to strive to be sincere and pure. We hope to become more like Christ and model his behavior with each passing day. We should all be hoping to become more than were yesterday. Only the Holy Spirit empowers us to want to cooperate with God—to work toward

becoming who we were meant to be in Christ. This is what being sanctified is all about.

On All Saint's Sunday we celebrate saints. The Protestant understanding of the word "saint" is those who have been and are now faithful Christians. It's that grandfather I had that witnessed to me the love of God in action. It's that uncle you grew up with that showed you what grace and mercy look like. It's that mom you had you call your best friend that lives forever in your heart and mind. The word saint means someone who has been set apart by God as a child of God.

The community we worship and fellowship with on a regular basis forms us, and it strengthens our faith. We're not alone in our journey of faith. We're not lone rangers. We're bound together because of Christ. It's those saints who have gone before us, those who are present with us here today, and those who our children will be in community with as they worship Christ. We are a community who centers our affections on Christ, and we strive to mutually support each other in our journey of faith. If we see you once a month, we want to support you. If we only see you three times over the summer, we want to support you. We're bound together in spirit because of the work of Christ.

The gospel and letters of John are about abiding in Christ. In fact, the word abide is one of John's favorite words. He uses it 34 times in his gospel and 19 times in his letters. It means to "to stay", to be "stand fast," or to "remain" in Christ. It carries with it the idea to not wander off and to stay where you are.
. Don't leave! Stay put! Carry on doing the work of Christ! Don't jump ship! Stay on board! When we sustain relationships with people we become stronger, and the body of Christ becomes stronger. When one person abides in Christ, and we commune with them, it's a motivation for another person to abide with Christ.

To have a friend who abides with you is to always be present to help you in time of need. Imagine the closeness of Christ to his Father. Now imagine the closeness we can have to each other because we're bound together by the same spirit that lives in Christ and in the Father. The Holy Spirit is constantly influencing us to love and forgive—to serve as Christ served the church and was one with his Father.

Only when we're bound to Christ who is bound to the Father can we be bound to each other. We walk with Christ in a close, intimate, and permanent relationship that enables us to walk with each other. The glue that holds us together is the love of God. We love, we forgive, and we include and accept each other just the way we are.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. We give thanks to God, and we remember those who have gone before us because they were empowered by the love of God to remain with Christ throughout their lives. They acted out God's divine love when they were with us. Because of their faithfulness it's easier for us to remain faithful. Let's continue to remember them and the love that's been shown to us. Let's purpose to set aside the first Sunday in November for this time of reflection.

Let's pray. God, next week when we celebrate Holy Communion we remember you. We remember your mighty acts through Jesus Christ. Today, we remember the faithful saints of God who witnessed your love to us. We light a candle and ask for that same endurance that sustained them. We thank you for them in our lives. Help us O God to be a faithful witness so your children would remember us. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.