

## “One Anothering”

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Psalm 133 ,I Peter 4: 7-11 and I Thessalonians 5:8-11, John 13:34-35

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About ten years ago the New Yorker magazine carried an article which told of the search for Sam Todd. Sam Todd was a Yale Divinity School student who disappeared after a New Year's Eve party in New York City. In the weeks after his disappearance, his family and friends staged a city wide search for him. His parents and brothers dropped their work and opened an office in a Greenwich Village church. Over 200 hundred of his classmates and friends came to New York City to search for him. In commenting on this sad, noble, but fruitless search, the New Yorker reporter observed the following:

“The wide sea that seems to separate most of us from the derelicts and the dirty street people and the homeless is really (not too broad)...In purely practical terms, our lives are not nearly so far away as most of us imagine from those men with the matted beards who wander through (the city), those of the eternally tired women with their ...plastic bags. It is the rare person who could not conceivably be reduced to the same raggedy shape by a combination of plausible circumstances- the loss of a job, the breakup of a marriage, an encounter with alcoholism, a bout of mental illness, a sudden disability. For most of us, misfortunes like these are mere catastrophes; for some people, such events are enough to turn them into ghosts who wander the city wrapped in blankets, enough to make them think of the bus station as home....One reason for the different outcomes,...,is that most of us, when we fall, are saved by people who care enough to catch us, and who have the strength.”

The most important difference is that some of us have social networks strong enough to catch us when we fall. We may or may not have strong social networks to help us get through difficult times, but do we have spiritual networks that help us grow in faith? That build us as disciples of Christ?

In our scripture readings, this morning we heard the following:

“Behold how good and wonderful it is when kindred live together in unity.”

“Maintain constant love for one another.. be hospitable to one another without complaining...serve one another.”

“encourage each other and build up one another.”

“Love one another, just as I have love you...”

Did you get it? We are to be about one anothering.

The term "one another" appears 91 times in the New Testament and 53 in the Pastoral Epistles.

Thirty-five times they are an occurring word pattern which mentions a verb followed by the term "one another."

These "one another" passages teach us how to love each other in community. To be a network of spiritual support for each other.

Hear a few more of the one anothering passages in Scripture:

Romans 5:13 - Don't pass judgment on one another

Romans 12:5 - Be members of one another

Romans 12:10 - Honor one another  
Romans 12:16 - Live in harmony with one another  
Romans 14:19 - Build up one another  
Romans 15:5 - Be like-minded toward one another  
Romans 15:7 - Accept one another  
1 Corinthians 12:25 - Care for one another  
Galatians 5:13 - Serve one another in love  
Galatians 5:26 - Don't provoke one another  
Galatians 6:2 - Bear one another's burdens  
Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another  
Colossians 3:13 - Bear with each other and forgive one another  
1 Thessalonians 3:12 - Abound in love toward one another  
1 Thessalonians 4:18 - Comfort one another  
Titus 3:3 - Don't hate one another  
Hebrews 3:13 - Encourage one another  
Hebrews 10:24 - Stir up one another to love and good deeds  
James 4:11 - Don't slander one another  
James 5:9 - Don't bear grudges against one another  
James 5:16 - Confess your sins to one another  
1 Peter 4:9 - Offer hospitality to one another  
1 Peter 5:14 - Greet one another  
1 John 1:7 - Fellowship with one another  
Ephesians 5:21- submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

One anothering is significant in our faith and in our lives. First, we need to practice one anothering so that we may be fully human, all that God created us to be. In the beginning, God created Adam and Adam was alone- no one to connect with, no one to talk with, no one! And God said, "It is not good that man should be alone."

The Hebrew language which most of the Old Testament is written begins with the consonant aleph. Written it looks like a cursive X. If it is written by itself it has no sound when it is pronounced. The aleph depends upon the surrounding vowels and consonants to give it its sound. Jewish scholars interpret the silent aleph to mean this: just as the aleph alone has no sound so it is with us. Alone we are silent. Our lives can only speak when we are linked together with other people. To be alone, unconnected to people, and uninvolved in a community was and is a sign of death.

Many years ago, my wife Doris and I were at my grandmother's home celebrating her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. Her home was crammed full of people, over 70 uncles, aunts, cousins and their children were gathered. The group spanned four generations. As I was leaving, I sat next to my grandmother and remarked how joyful she might feel that she was the mother of this whole clan. Tears of joy filled her eyes. She and I in unspoken words understood each other. We need each other to be fully human. We need connection and communion with each other to be all that God has created us to be.

We, also, need each other to be Christ followers. John Bunyan in the classic book, Pilgrim's Progress began with the main character Christian. Christian's journey is a

solitary one. He leaves home and separates himself from family and friends. He travels with other people, but they are not true companions. They are just a collection of individuals on the same road at the same time.

Later in the book, the main character shifts to Christiana. She travels with true companions. On their journey, the risks and difficulties are shared together. The moments of doubt and uncertainty are overcome by everyone bearing one another's burdens and working together.

We need each to be effective followers of Jesus Christ. Geese fly in a V formation because the flapping action of their wings creates an upward lift for the goose that follows behind the other. This action gives the entire flock a 71% greater range than if each bird flew alone. Without a companion alongside us praying, encouraging, bearing burdens, we will never be as effective disciples of Christ.

After Jesus died and rose again, those to whom he said, "Love one another as I have loved you" went and did so and God used them to change the world. The success and spread of the Christian faith was astonishing, really unparalleled in history. But, those first Christians didn't spread the faith through TV or radio, billboards or mass mailings, or even going door to door, or any of the church growth techniques employed today. We are told by ancient writers that what attracted people to the faith was how Christians acted, especially toward each other. People looked upon Christians in awe and said, "Behold, How They Love One Another."

In recent months, we have heard a lot about Egypt and the protest to bring freedom to their country. You may have also heard about the Christian community there. Egypt is a predominantly Muslim country. But about 10-15% of the population are Christians.

Most Christians in Egypt are called "Coptic." The Copts are ethnically identical to Muslim Egyptians. You can't just look at an Egyptian and figure out whether he or she is a Christian or not...unless, that is, you look at her or his wrist. For centuries, Egyptian Christians have tattooed a cross on their wrists. They are not forced to do so; it is their choice. But in a country where you can be persecuted and even killed for being a Christian, this tattoo is a courageous and telltale sign that declares openly, "I belong to Jesus."

Jesus told us there ought to be a telltale sign that we are his. In the Upper Room with his disciples on his last night with them, Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." What is that telltale sign of being a Christ follower? A prominent tattoo? No. Love. Love for one another. A life of commitment and action that chooses...that seeks... God's highest good for our brother and sister.

Our faith in Jesus Christ has two dimensions: First it is vertical. We are to love God as Christ said with all our heart, and soul and mind.

Second, our faith in Christ is horizontal. We are "to love our neighbors as we love ourselves".

Our faith is not balanced and strong, unless we have both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Think of a cross. It has both the vertical beam and the horizontal. As God's people, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to a cross

shaped life: one in which we connect with God and with one another. Is your life cross shaped?

Robert Wuthnow, Professor of Social Sciences and the Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University says,  
“Nearly everyone in our society desperately wants community, but...most people have trouble finding it in all the ways they would like it to be present in their lives. Neighborhoods and the workplace provide opportunities for interaction, but for most people these arenas do not yield the sharing and caring they desire. Small groups are the answer.”

Are we in a small group where we connect with others to build and strengthen our faith? Are you practicing one anothering within this community of faith? Is your life cross shaped? Let us go and love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind and love our neighbors as we love ourselves”. Amen!