Sunday, November 1, 2020
Grace Congregational United Church of Christ
Sermon Pastor Alberta

The Tie That Binds

Scriptures - Psalm 34:1-10, 22; John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above. (#272 in the Pilgrim Hymnal)

If we were able to do congregational singing safely, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” would have been one of the hymns we sang today.

Our Prayer shawl group is one example of the “tie that binds,” as they literally use yarn to connect and bind.

Community engagement is in many different forms in most churches and Grace Church is no different. We continue to lift up, reintroduce and to remind others of the many different ways they can share their gifts of
time and talents; and the giving of ones talents and
gifts is your individual and collective way to uplift,
empower, protect, heal, advocate, comfort, strengthen,
love and transform the community of Grace and the
community where Grace Church resides and even
those communities miles away and across the globe.

I wear the prayer shawl today given to me by my last
church First Congregational Church of Wakefield,
Wakefield NH. It gave me great joy to hear, their search
and call committee has extended the call of pastoral
partnership to a candidate! I wear this prayer shawl today
in remembrance and in solidarity with another
community of God, to uplift them and to visually carry
the love I have for them and they have for me into this
community of God to show our connectedness. The tie
that binds is community and community love is the
message we hear today in our scripture texts.

The psalmist in Psalm 34 invites the community to bless
the Lord/ bend your knee for the Lord/ boast of the
Lord’s character. Praise the Lord as you remember how
God has plucked you out of seasons that were hindering/
stifling your growth spiritually, emotionally, relationally
and financially.

The psalmist is talking/ singing/praying with and to their
children, their disciples, their community inviting them
to taste and see/ be in relationship with God/ saying:
magnify the Lord with me. The psalmist does not hold
back in sharing the personal story of their relationship
with God and how when it seemed there was no way out;
when it seemed that fear would paralyze and they would
have no strength physically, emotionally or spiritually to
rise up/ the psalmist shares with the community that they
called out/ they cried to the Lord for help. The psalmist
did not allow pride or shame to prevent the raising of
their voice to ask for help. Psalm 34 says the tie that binds is tasting and seeing that God is good: ask for help; expect a new revelation to come; try something new.

COVID land has made this mandatory and not an option. We have seen new innovative ways to be church and have become to expect to be surprised-the gift of COVID-expect surprises like trying a new food whose aroma is wafting all around you. The psalmist testimony is the sweet aroma; our testimonies- speaking how God has shown us how to be church; share with others what Grace is doing, entice, invite them to taste and see how God’s love is showing up in this community.

The letter from 1 John in the first chapter says:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the God our Creator and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us.

A call to be in community based on the testimony of those who have been transformed by Jesus ministry. Christian tradition says the writer of 1 John is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, but since John was a common name then as well as today, authorship is debated. Yet, who best to send a love letter, a letter of encouragement than the one who laid his head on Jesus’ chest at the last supper. Who best to send a letter pointing others to the light, love, and life of Jesus than the one trusted to care for Jesus mother?
This community was going through doctrinal changes. What do we believe; competing with what was going on in the Roman Empire. What are our values that are derived from our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus? This is where we are today. Vote your faith values! This shows the world what you believe as a follower of Jesus.

This letter was also received during the time of leadership changes. Aging apostles and growing new understandings of what Jesus taught required the one who loved them, the elder to remind them effective leaders love their people all of them; and relate to them well; they shed light on issues and make decisions using the ministry of Jesus as a guide. They push life into the organization by their presence, their skills, and their character.

These are qualities every church going through search and call must remember. When coaching of the search and call committee begins, they will be reminded of the “Marks of Ministry” developed by the UCC built on the precepts that a pastoral partner loves, gives life and shines the light and grows continually into the call to ministry by preparation and self-care.

The Beatitudes show us what the new community the disciples are being invited to form will look like. The Beatitudes shows us the work of the community.

Remember the first century culture was not individualistic. They knew the importance of kin and kin groups. Even though they were separated by economic and kinship status, they heard the beatitudes as this is my responsibility to my kin ship group. I will intercede on behalf of those who need assistance; I will advocate on behalf of those who are oppressed and do my part in reversing their current situation of
oppression. Most importantly, they would have heard they are in partnership with the oppressed and the oppressed or marginalized are not a charity group that needs to be given a donation. The mindset of kinship should be an equalizer, my sister and my brother have the same dignity and respect as I have and I walk with them in their grief and oppression to be apart of the movement towards transformation.

The tie that binds is community; is kinship; is love; is equality; is equity; is sharing your story so others can taste and see the goodness of God.

Before our Creators throne,
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, or aims are one-
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes;
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

From sorrow, toil, and pain,
And sin we shall be free;
And perfect love and oneness reign
Through all eternity.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Shalom, Pastor Alberta
Scriptures

Psalm 34:1-10, 22 (NRSV)

I will extol the LORD at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.  
I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.  
Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.  
I sought the LORD, and he answered me;  
he delivered me from all my fears.  
Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.  
This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;  
he saved him out of all his troubles.  
The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,  
and he delivers them.  
Taste and see that the LORD is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.  
Fear the LORD, you his holy people,  
for those who fear him lack nothing.  
The lions may grow weak and hungry,  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.  

The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

John 3:1-3 (NRSV)

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.
The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.