

Our Life Together

Sermon notes for the sermon

Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young

On Sunday, November 13, 2011

Throughout my ministry I have held the firm belief that in and through the lives of the members of the church God has provided what is needed for the ministry of Christ to grow and flourish. As Gwen White, wife of one of our former bishops, once said, "Each of us is a word from God and when God brings us together we become a living message of hope and salvation." In each of us God has provided the gifts, graces and resources for the ministry of Christ here in New Brunswick and its surrounding communities. Each of us is a word from God which is vital for the complete message of God here and now for this generation and generations yet to come.

Think for a moment how different the community in which you reside would be if no one collected the trash; or if no one bravely put on the uniform of a fire fighter, emt, or police officer. What would our communities be like if no one was employed as a grocery checker or a street sweeper? Who would care for the homebound if there were no home health aides or visiting nurses? Without tax payers there would be no government. Without politicians there would be anarchy – every person for herself or himself. There would be chaos and many,

unable to care for themselves, would be neglected. Each one of us plays a vital role in ordering the life of the community in which we live.

The same can be said for the life of the community of faith-the church. Without Sunday school teachers there would be no classes; how would we learn about God and grow in our practice of the Christian faith? Without hospitality Fellowship Hall would be just a meeting place – the hospitality ministry provides for fellowship, comfort and a chance to enter into deeper relationship with one another. Without our choirs the ministry of music would not be as inspirational and full; the voices of the congregation would not be heard singing the hymns of our faith and new songs that lift us to the highest heavens. Each one of us is vital to the ministry of Christ here in this place; each one is needed for the fullness of the message of salvation to be heard.

Today is pledge Sunday-a day for us to prayerfully recommit ourselves as a living community of faith to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ our Savior. What is your place within the body of Christ? Have you discovered the gift that God has given to you for the good of our life together as a church? If you have discovered your gift have you placed it in service to God's holy kingdom with your brothers and sisters so that the fullness of God's message can be heard and seen?

If you have not yet discovered your gift perhaps this might help (it was shared by Professor Elizabeth E. Platt in one of the courses I took years ago at Rutgers),
"You can begin to discover your God-given gift when you look out upon the

world's needs and feel your heart-stings being pulled. Your gift is found at the intersection of the world's needs and your passionate desire to care for at least one of those needs."

A gift from God becomes a gift only when it is placed in service for the purpose of God. What God has given to us is not something that is meant to be kept to ourselves. It is given with the intention that it will be used for the good of the kingdom with the risk that in using it, it might be lost. The hope that God has in giving gifts freely to all is that in using them we will grow in our understanding and use of them – similar to an artist who practices in order to gain skills, understand and proficiency. God places us in a community of faith so that we will encourage and support one another as we join our gifts with others and become part of the life saving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you know the gift with which God has equipped you, have you dared to place it in service to the kingdom? If you have been reluctant I encourage you to make today the day that you offer it to God. Maybe you have felt the tug at your heart to care for the homebound or to help teach the adults, youth or children; maybe you have felt the call to serve in the community through the tutoring program or men's shelter; perhaps you have felt deep within you the nudging to get involved with the ministry of hospitality or music or worship. Or perhaps you have wanted to serve the church through one of its ministries but are physically unable to do so – maybe, just maybe, God is calling you to be a prayer warrior for that ministry; to surround the ministry of worship or education or outreach or music or hospitality

with prayers of encouragement and support. There is a place for each and every one of us in this ministry that we share together.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008 states this, "A [church] member is bound in sacred covenant to shoulder the burdens, share the risks, and celebrate the joys of fellow members. A Christian is called to speak the truth in love, always ready to confront conflict in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation."

(Paragraph 219, page 143) Through baptism and our profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior Christ's life has become our life together. As a local community of Christian faith we are called to live here and now as Christ seeks to live through us. This is Christ's church and our church. Today through our pledges of time and talent and our pledges of tithes we recommit ourselves to this ministry. Joshua put the challenge to his people in his day and the challenge still remains for all of us, "Choose this day whom you will serve....but as for me and my household we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:16 NRSV)