

9.14.25 **Homecoming Sunday ~ “Better Together” ~ Created for Connection**

Ephesians 4:1-6 *NRSVUE* ~ **Unity in the Body of Christ**

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:
there is one body and one Spirit,
just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all. *This is the Word of God...*

Good morning, church! And as we’ve said, it’s not just any morning—this is **Homecoming Sunday** at First Methodist!

Can you feel the energy in the room?

*This is the day we kick off all our ministries,
welcome folks back after summer,
& remind ourselves of who we are: a faith family created for connection.

Last week we began our preaching series, *Created for Connection*, with the message **“Make Yourself at Home.”**

We said that God’s invitation isn’t about proving you belong—it’s about resting in the truth that you *already* belong.

In God’s house, there’s room for you...there’s always room for more!

And today, we’re taking it one step further.

Because home isn’t just about where *you* belong.

It’s about living in community.

Belonging isn’t meant to be a solo experience—it’s something we live out together. Which is why today’s theme is: **Better Together.**

Let me tell you a story.

Years ago, I was on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic where I was partnered on worksite and as a roomie, with someone who—on the surface—couldn't have been more different from me.

Different generation, different background, different denomination, different way of looking at the world.

I remember thinking, “*Lord, how is this going to work?*”

But here's what happened: as we served side by side each day building houses, sharing meals, Sharing stories about our own faith journeys that brought us to the mtns of the DR.

Praying at night—praying with families who we served alongside building their new home, praying with our host Dominican family who embodied, “Make yourself at home in God's love” in their house and around their table for meals.

As we did all this, I realized we actually had *so very much* in common.

We both wanted to serve God. We both wanted to love people
And to put that love into action.

And you know, before too long, the differences that seemed so big at first, started to feel small compared to the faith that held us together.

The common ground we ALL stood upon was so easy to find amidst our calling to serve as One Body- One Spirit- One Lord in the mtns of the DR.

Well, **that's** what Paul is talking about in Ephesians:

when you strip everything else away,
what unites us in Christ...is far stronger than what divides us. Amen?

But let's be real—it's not always easy.

We live in a culture, in a world...that thrives on division.

Just scroll FaceBook, SnapChat, Instagram or TikTok for 30 seconds, and you'll see it...TRUTH?

Or walk into a workplace where people are pitted against each other.

Or maybe even at the dinner table when conversations get tense,
Or in your classroom.

And yes—even in the church, we sometimes let things divide us.
Like worship styles. Traditions. Generational differences.
OR who gets to make which decision.

Sometimes we can forget that what we share in Christ—
who **is** our common ground—is bigger than what separates us.

Division leaves us exhausted. It leaves us lonely.

Division can leave us angry, and yeah totally frustrated.

And that's **exactly** why Paul's words matter so much today.

And let us remember that Paul writes from prison.

Now, if I'm in prison, I might be writing letters that sound like:

"Send help. Send a 'Get Out of Jail Free' card. Get me out of here."

But Paul? He's talking about unity, hope, and calling. He says:

"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

I love how the Message says it: "While I am still locked up here,
a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—
better yet run!—on the road God called you to travel.

Notice he doesn't say "*sit in it*" or "*think about it*."

He says *walk—better yet run! GO!* Because faith is active. It's ongoing.

It's something we do together.

So, how do we walk this walk or run on this path...this calling?

Well Paul gives us a road map in vv 2-3—We do it through humility,
gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love,
and making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit
through the bond of peace.

Unpacking each a little helps us find our way today:

Humility means not thinking less of yourself,
but thinking of yourself less often.

That means setting aside the need to always win the argument
or prove your point. It's the posture that says,
"*Your needs matter as much as mine.*"

*In the church, humility allows us to listen for God's voice in one another.

Walking in **Gentleness** is strength under control, kindness in action.

It's like having a powerful horse that's been trained—it's still strong,
but its strength is channeled.

Gentleness is choosing not to bulldoze people with our opinions,
but instead meeting them with compassion.

Patience means refusing to give up on people, even when it's frustrating.
God has been endlessly patient with us, amen?

So when someone in your small group talks too much,
or that family member keeps disappointing you,
patience is the gift that keeps the door open instead of slamming it shut.

To walk together **Bearing with one another in love...**
is more than just "putting up with."

It means actively supporting each other, even when it's inconvenient.
Carrying each other's burdens.

Sometimes it's as simple as a text that says, "*I'm praying for you.*"
Sometimes it's rolling up your sleeves and showing up
when someone can't carry their load alone.

And finally, Paul names **Peace**. Peace is not just the absence of conflict,
but the wholeness that comes when God's Spirit is in charge.

It's a peace that allows very different people to sit at the same table
and not just tolerate each other, but love each other.

Peace is what makes the church look different from the world.

And so my friends, why do we walk this way? Because we're ONE.

Paul says it again and again: *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord,
one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.*

Friends—THIS is why we are **better together**.

And this is something we're about to experience right here at FMC—
the **Apple Festival** this coming Friday.

Last year, do you remember what happened?

Almost **1,000 people** came to our church! Families, kids, neighbors—
many of whom had never stepped foot into our church before.

And what made it beautiful wasn't just the cider or the games
or the music. It was the **togetherness**.

People of every age, from little kids in the bounce house, to face painting,
to our youth serving food, to adults baking pies,
to experiencing all styles of music and entertainment,
to folks greeting at the welcome table.

Everyone had a part. Everyone brought their gifts of time, talent
& a willingness to welcome, connect and share the love of God to ALL.

That's the picture of "better together."

Not everyone doing the same thing,
but everyone walking in the same Spirit, united in the same love.
Serving, welcoming, belonging as ONE body in Christ.

So let me ask you: where is God calling you to walk differently this fall?

*How is God calling you to walk differently this fall?

*Maybe it's to walk in humility—to listen more than you talk.

Humility is hard, isn't it? Our world rewards the loudest voice,
the person who insists on being right.

But humility is about making space for others, being willing to learn.

That could mean biting your tongue in a heated conversation,
OR asking someone younger than you—or older than you—
Asking them, "Well...what do you think?"

Humility says, "I don't have to have all the answers,
because we're better together."

*Or maybe its to walk in gentleness—and respond with kindness,
even when you don't feel like it.

~Gentleness is not weakness. It's strength that's been tamed by love.

~It's choosing the softer word when the sharp one
would come more naturally.

~Maybe that means you don't snap at your spouse when you're tired.

~Maybe it means sending encouragement to a coworker
who gets on your nerves.

Gentleness is what makes people feel safe in our presence—
and it opens the door for connection.

*Or walk this fall in patience—with that family member, that classmate,
that person sitting a few pews away. Patience doesn't come easy.

~Some of us are wired to want results now.

But patience is the long game.

~It's trusting that God is working even when we don't see it.

~It might look like not giving up on that child or grandchild
who's wrestling with their faith.

~It might look like being gracious with someone new at church
who doesn't yet know "how we do things."

Patience is what keeps us walking together instead of walking away.

*And how do we walk "bearing with one another"?

~Well, by stepping up. Stepping up to serve in a ministry,
or lead a committee or to simply show up for someone who's hurting.

~This is where it gets real. Bearing with one another
means carrying some of the load.

~It means when someone in our church family is grieving,
you bring the casserole, or you just sit with them in the silence.

~It means when there's a need for Kids Church, YF or Youth Grp,
or ushers, or Apple Festival volunteers—you say,

"I can do that. I'll show up."

Because together, we can carry more than we ever could alone.

*And friends, don't just attend church—**walk with us**.
Plug into a sm grp. Teach a class. Join the choir.
Volunteer at the Apple Festival this Friday.
Come every Sunday for worship. Sign up for a mission project.

These aren't just programs.

These are the ways we practice walking, & yes running with Christ.
These are the ways we discover again & again that in Christ,
we are truly better together...AND it is our calling from God!

Imagine with me for a moment: what if every single person here...
All of you worshipping online...what if each of us
walked in a manner worthy of this calling?

~Our church would look like a quilt—
different fabrics stitched into one beautiful whole.
~OR like a mosaic—each broken piece finding its place in God's picture.
~Or like a family table—
where every generation has a seat and every voice matters.

And let me tell you...the community of Moorestown would know—
FMC? *That's the church where love looks like **unity**.*
*That's the church where people **belong**.*
*That's the church where they really are **better together**.*

So here's the challenge: this fall, don't settle for sitting on the sidelines.
Step into the story God is writing here at FMC.

Be the one who shows patience when it's hard,
who speaks with gentleness when the world shouts,
who carries someone else's burden when it feels heavy.

Because when we walk this road side by side, Christ's love shines brighter.
Better together isn't just our theme—it's our witness.

Let's rise to it. Let's live it.

And let's let the world see Jesus through us. Amen and Amen!