

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Life Together — Together... But Not

Sunday, September 13, 2020

Rev. Emily Campbell

Rev. Emily Campbell — Greeting and Announcements

Friends, good morning! Welcome to worship on this September 13th. It is my joy this morning to welcome you to our church's Thrift Shop, which is located at 331 N Main Street. If you are here in Plymouth, it is opposite Bode's restaurant. Today as a church, we are celebrating God's faithfulness on display as we celebrate our Thrift Shop's 70th anniversary! From the beginning of this service to its end, we will celebrate God's gracious provision in our lives to care for one another. Today I am delighted to be leading this service along with Ted Porter who is one of the current managers of the Thrift Shop. He will be serving as our liturgist today. For our music today, we are blessed in having both Geff Phillips and our Chancel Choir. Now let me just say a word about our Chancel Choir. They are going to be singing right after the sermon. You'll see them outside in masks, socially distanced from each other, but I encourage you to please hang on to the very end of our service because there we have a prerecorded piece of music for you from the Chancel Choir that will knock your socks off, so please stay to the end.

As a church, we continue to find new ways to do fellowship together during these unusual times. To that end, we are continuing in our Friday lawn chair fellowship. Each Friday in September from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., bring your lawn chair, bring a mask, come, and we will have an opportunity to see each other and catch up on each other's lives. If you are working and unable to join us on Fridays, we have an additional fellowship opportunity for you; that's Saturday, September 19th, from noon to 2:00 p.m. We hope you will come, bring your lawn chair, and mask. We would love to see you and this is also an opportunity, if you didn't get your daily devotional guide last week or your Psalm card or your ice cream sandwich—all those will be available for you on Saturday, September 19th between 12:00 and 2:00 p.m.

One last fellowship opportunity: As part of the 70th anniversary of the Thrift Shop, the Thrift Shop is holding an anniversary sale this coming week. Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and Wednesday from 6:00 to 8:00 at night, everything in the store will be 50% off. Just think, an item that was once a dollar is now \$0.50! Join our Thrift Shop and be part of that celebration, as well.

Friends, I want to take a minute to thank Susan Underhill. If it were not for her video skills and patience, this service would never come together.

Rev. Campbell — Opening Prayer

Please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we thank you today for the gift of your abiding presence. In every season of our lives, in every joy and challenge, you are there. We thank you, dear God, that there's no place we can go in this life, no experience, where you are not with us. We praise you for your presence among us this morning, we praise you for your faithfulness on display, even here in our Thrift Shop. We ask, dear God, that in this time and throughout this service that your Holy Spirit would lead each of us closer to you. Free our minds today, we pray, from any distractions or worries. Please forgive us

for the many things that we put before you in our lives. Some of these things are necessary, but some of these things simply distract us from you. Bring us back again, Lord, into your holy presence and lead us forward in faith. This we pray through the strong name of Jesus Christ, your son. Amen.

Friends, today in our worship service we are beginning a new four-week sermon series, entitled “Life Together.” It seems fitting in this time when we are apart from each other that we would be reminded of God's call to live our lives in unity and in community. If we were to take a step back and look at our lives today from the outside, we would see that in so many ways we have become separated from one another, as we work from our homes, as our children go to school online, as we worship apart from one another. We feel this separation, add to that different political perspectives and growing racial unrest, and we can feel the disease that comes from a fractured community and a lack of unity. We hope in these next four weeks that we can look at God's call for us to live in close fellowship, not only with God, but with each other, We hope that we will be sharing very practical advice about what it means to live together even when we are physically separated from each other. So, join us throughout September and let us learn to do life together

Ted Porter, Thrift Shop Co-Manager and Rev. Campbell

Scripture Reading — Romans 12:2-18

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Rev. Campbell – Sermon

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to come now and speak to us through your Word. Unlock our hearts, our minds to the promptings of your spirit and lead us, we pray, closer to you and closer to each other. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, today is September 13th and it was exactly six months ago today that our lives completely changed. On March 13th, we woke up and realized that school, in some cases, was cancelled, or, at least, announced that it would be canceled. In the weeks ahead, for many of us, we were told to stay home from work and began a new life pattern which we did not realize would BE a pattern, by working at home. That day, March 13th, was also the first time we announced that we would be holding church online for the very first time. We asked people to join us by watching on the Internet. Friends, little did we know them how different our lives would be six months later. None of us know how long this new pattern of life will last and the longer we go on it is natural for us to wonder if we ever will be able to return completely to our lives as they were.

We, instead, are trying to navigate new normals. The good news today is that although there may be new normals in certain areas of our lives, with God and with our relationship with God, we have the blessing, and the benefit, and the knowledge that God never changes, no matter what else in our lives may change. No matter what may be unfamiliar, God is exactly the same. God calls us to live in relationship with him and God calls us to live in relationship with each other. That call to live in relationship with each other is no less valid, is no less important now when we are isolated from each other, then at other times. In fact, I would argue that now it is increasingly important that we learn how to live life together under the call of God, even while we are separated from one another.

Friends, the call to live in community is essential. As Christians we are called to live differently than the rest of the world. We are called to be set apart. In the book of Romans, chapter 12 makes that clear. Right at the beginning, Romans 12, verse 2 says this, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God; what is good and acceptable and perfect." Friends, as the world learns how to function alone, we must always remember that we are designed by God to live in relationship *with God* and *with* one another.

Romans chapter 12 describes this relationship, of how we live in relationship to one another. Listen to this, "For as in one body, we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ and individually we are members of one another." We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. So, friends, the truth of our call from God is that we are called to live as one body with different functions within that body. To live into those different functions, we must first recognize that God has gifted each of us with gifts that we can use to worship God and to build up and strengthen the ministry and witness of this body.

So, our first step in learning how to live life together is recognizing the individual gifts God has given to us to be used for the benefit of the body as a whole. So, for us, at this time, even when we are isolated from each other, we need to step back and ask ourselves what gifts do I have today that can be used for the glory of God? I have seen many of you use these gifts already. I have seen some of you sew masks for people and for hospitals and clinics. I have seen others of you prepare meals to take to people in need within our congregation and community. I have seen many of you volunteer here at the Thrift Shop,

once it was reopened, to serve the needs within our community. Within our congregation we are blessed with people who work in building and construction and they have been tending to the needs of our own building. There are others who are prayer warriors, who are praying for those most in need during these circumstances, and others who are encouraging people of every generation to not give up their faith in this time of challenge.

We are called to recognize our gifts and then offer those gifts to God in worship and for the strengthening of the body of Christ. We risk our closeness with God when we deny our gifts, as much as it is a sin to hoard our gifts and to not share them with others. It is equally a sin to deny that we have any gifts. God equips each of us at every stage in our lives with gifts and abilities by which we can serve God and even if our gift is prayer, that is a mighty gift offered to a person in need.

To give you an idea what a difference it can make when we offer God our talents and our gifts and abilities, I would like to tell you a story that started way back in 1949. At that time Mrs. Frank Newell (I don't even know her first name) was led to propose an idea at a women's meeting of running a thrift shop in the Plymouth community. Whatever prompted her, and I would believe it was God himself, she took this idea to the meeting. Then the women in charge of the women's association of our church at that time took it to Session, and by the summer of 1950, our church had voted to run a retail shop so that the women of our church could sell outgrown clothes and make money for mission. The store was established first on Penniman Ave. Over the history of the past 70 years, the shop has operated continuously in seven different locations within Plymouth, many of which have been in Plymouth's Old Village. There has been tremendous growth in the shop's proceeds through the years. Where the income started in very small amounts, and actually at a loss to the church, the shop today has generated what we believe to be well over \$1,000,000 that has all gone to mission!

The shop is only running today because of the witness and the faith and the sharing of the gifts of time and talent of those who have gone before us. People like Gladys Nesbitt who ran the shop for 27 years; people like Jean Bacheldor, who argued every dollar made within the Thrift Shop would go to missions; people like VeraLou Scott, the longest serving volunteer in the Thrift Shop's history who still volunteers today, have all made a tremendous difference to this store. Today, thanks to the blessing of the time and talent of Ted Porter and Lynne Porter and Linda Luke, who have served as the managers of the Thrift Shop for many years, we now have over 70 different volunteers who operate and give of their time and talent within this store each week! Over half of these are church members, but many are not. It is a great witness to the community as a whole and it has been a great example of what happens when God's people can share their gifts and work as one body together.

This thrift shop has been a tremendous blessing to our congregation and to our community. It has been wonderful to see God at work through it--even in this pandemic, when we have been isolated from each other. The flip side of that is everyone has had time to go through their closets; everybody has had time to bring donation after donation to the Thrift Shop. The Thrift Shop's ministry has actually thrived as a result of this time apart and God receives the glory for that!

Friends, this is, again, a perfect example of our life together, bringing our gifts of time and talent to God. It is very interesting, if you read within the New Testament, every time it mentions the body of Christ working together with various gifts, a particular teaching always immediately follows. I say *always*, because this happens both in Romans 12 and

also in First Corinthians 12, where it talks about the one body with many parts. The teaching that follows is *always* on the subject of love, because if this body is going to last long term, then we have to learn how to love each other, love each other deeply, to love each other in a way that covers sins and failings because that will happen as well in any body, just as it happens in any family. Romans chapter 12 talks about this at verse 10. It says there we are called to love one another with mutual affection, we are supposed to outdo one another in showing honor to each other. We are to serve the Lord, not lacking in zeal but being ardent in spirit. We are called to love each other as if we are members of one family and when we love each other like that, it means, at times, we will also have to forgive each other.

It says later on in Romans chapter 12, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, live in community with each other.” “Live in harmony,” it says, “with one another. Do not be haughty. Do not think yourself greater than anyone else. Do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay evil for evil. Do what is noble in the sight of all.” It says at verse 18, “If it is possible so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Friends, our call to Christian community is a call to love deeply, It is a call for us, in loving each other deeply, to also forgive each other when necessary. It is a call not to give up on one another. Even in failings and fumbings, we are called to continue to work for the witness of Christ. Friends, today, even though in some ways our lives are still separated from each other through the effects of this virus, we are called into unity, even when that unity is at odds with the world. We are called to live differently, just as Christ has changed our lives and made us different. I pray that the living and sharing of our gifts, of our time and talent and resources, will be a holy act of worship today and always. In Jesus’ name we ask this. Amen.

Rev. Campbell – Closing Prayer, Benediction and Blessing

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we do thank you today for your faithfulness and love. We thank you for your abiding spirit which prompts us to accept our gifts and offer our gifts as an act of worship. We do praise you and thank you, dear God, for the ministry of this Thrift Shop. We thank you for every volunteer, every patron, and every donor since the beginning of this ministry in 1950. Today we thank you for the impact the shop has made in the community and the life of our church and in the life of your world. We pray for the many mission projects and agencies that this Thrift Shop has helped to support. Bless their ministries, we pray. We thank you in advance for the witness that this shop will have, going into the future. We do pray today for the next 70 years of this shop. We pray that the body of Christ would be strengthened through this shop’s ministry and the community would feel its impact.

We pray today for those in need of help within our community. We remember and pray for those without work and for those without family and friends. We pray for those who are sick and in need. Please pour out your love and healing grace upon them. Please bring help and hope into every troubled heart. We pray, as well, today for teachers and for their families. In these trying times, may they find their strength and peace in you. We pray for families juggling work and home- schooling and childcare needs during this pandemic. May they know your presence, your power and your peace. As a church family, may we support them and care for them even as you care for us. This we pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ, your son, who taught us when we pray to say together,

Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

Friends, let us go from here today open to the leading and prompting of God's Holy Spirit. May we go from here today celebrating God's great faithfulness to us. As we go, may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen