

## **“Together”**

Song of Solomon 7:10-13:1-4, 8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

November 25, 2015 – 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald Botts

Our first scripture today is from the Song of Solomon, a poetic book rarely used in preaching. It's an intimate expression of love and relationship, very true to our ideal concept of family life. Some see in it a parallel to God's parental relationship with humanity, while others equate this book with the loving closeness of Christ with his Church. However we look at it, togetherness is an underlying theme throughout.

Our Epistle reading also emphasizes connection in a very familiar passage. Here it lifts up the idea that it takes a village to be a church and, in that village, there are a variety of needed abilities. Paul writes, “The gifts that Christ gave were that some might be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the believers for the work of ministry, for the building up of the Church, until all of us come to the unity of the faith...”

And, indeed, this is true. Many gifts are required for a church to really be the Church. The word that most stands out for me in this passage is “unity.” Gifts used together, Paul says, allow us to achieve the potential which is planted in us. It's the variety we embody that make us stronger and more productive.

Today, on this time change Sunday, I'm particularly reminded how quickly life moves on. Not so long ago we were losing an hour, but today we're gaining one. Perhaps that makes up a bit for the fact that we're now heading into winter. I think I like spring better.

At least a few times in March or April I like to take a long walk out in the country. After seemingly-endless cold it's always encouraging to see a bright new carpet of green covering the earth. The intense colors of the early flowers, along with the gay pastels of the shrubs, makes for a picture which no artist can ever capture in its entirety.

As you move from one place to another you pick up the sweet scents of a myriad of plants. What can be more marvelous than to walk near a cluster of lilacs and have the wind bring you waves of delicate aroma? In some cases you must bend very close to catch the fragrance of a particular flower, but your efforts will not go unrewarded. Each spring smell is a little different, a little sweeter or a bit more pungent. They are great alone, but our aromatic memories of spring are really a mixture of everything combined.

The statuesque tulip is a mainstay of spring, but if that were the only flower the beauty of the countryside would be sadly diminished. If the rose brought the only perfume to the world, our loss would be immeasurable. If the cheerful yellow of the daffodil would be the only color in nature, we would soon overlook it for its commonness.

Different attributes, when taken together, bring a harmonious blend in nature that we find pleasing. Should all vegetation be alike, the result would be one-dimensional and dreary. The

loss of any variety from the landscape diminishes the whole. Nature teaches us that diversity is important, even essential.

So it is with the church, and this is where our scriptures come back into play. In a congregation the gifts of each member prove important to the health and well-being of the entire community. Every person gives his or her unique contributions to the whole and all have value.

When Paul writes to the church at Ephesus he emphasizes the importance of each person and what they bring to the whole. This transcends all boundaries, like race or gender or nationality. It tells us that we need to think of ourselves as one unified fellowship where we all have our place. Therefore, what connects us together is greater than whatever divides us, and we should live together in gratitude for all our diversity.

Like flowers that enrich each other, we need to think of ourselves in the church as a garden of limitless variety. We bring who we are to our little plot and give back from what has been given to us. We're partners together as we engage in mutual witness for the Lord of Life.

Where there is need, as in the Liddell family this week, we pull together and respond with love. Where there is need, as in increasing hunger in America, we join the CROP Walk and raise \$1100 toward their goal. Where there is need, as in the case of peacemaking in a violent world, we respond by supporting our recent Presbyterian-wide offering.

Being together is also what it will take to move us ahead in meeting our budget needs for 2016. Just as our differences are reflected in so many other ways, so our personal resources vary from person to person. If we all pledge what we can, we have the possibility to step up to fill the \$30,000 shortfall left by the move of the Learning Center until we find another tenant for our building.

God has endowed us worldwide with all the gifts and skills and means to move the Church of Jesus Christ forward in fulfilling its mission. If all congregations would come up to their potential across the board, we could make a life-changing contribution to a world adrift and in search of salvation.

Let us begin here by making Highlands the very most it can be as we witness to God's love.