

Sep 26, 10 James 2:16-18 Rom 15:13 1John 3:16-18

## UMW SUNDAY-A COMMUNITY OF FAITH

It has been said that it takes a whole community or a village in to raise one child. I believe that statement is pretty true. It takes parents, teachers, coaches, friends and churches to help develop a child from the time they are born until they are out on their own. They may not know it when they are young but when they get older they will find out there have been certain people who have crossed their paths that have had a positive influence on them. A teacher, a parent, a friend, a Sunday School teacher, a pastor will impact their life in such a way that they will be able to look back and thank that person for setting them on the right track, helping them make right decisions, or just being there in times of need. Chuck Swindoll says there had been a few people like that in his life. There was a Marine sergeant overseas who taught him what his function was, and who helped him to remain faithful to his faith. He credits Billy Graham for helping him understand the mission of the church. Then there were his professors in college and seminary that planted seeds of faith in helping him understand his calling. We all have mentors that have touched our lives. I had Rev. Willis P. Miller, who took me under his wing and under whose preaching and teaching I came to salvation and heard God's call to ministry. I want to tell those who were in high school or junior high here in Williamsville in either 1983 or 1984 you may have heard him because we came to these schools and he did a message

about alcohol prevention with magic. He didn't preach per se, but he got his point across about how dangerous drinking is, and how drinking effects one's life.

This morning this message is about community. Last week we came together as a community as joined with the Christian church for the celebration of worship, fellowship, and food. It was a celebration praising God for watching over all during and following all that needed to be done following the tornado that destroyed homes and businesses. We the community of faith joined together in praise of our God.

Let me tell you what the community of faith looks like. The first thing that the community of faith has is its **faith in God**. Listen as Donna Slavens reads from the book of James. **2:14-16**

I believe those are powerful words for any community. You know why? Because it talks not only about believing, it talks about putting your faith into action. Because of John Wesley's born again experience he began to work in England to stop the child labor situation. Because of his faith in God he understood the need to help the poor, take care of the widows and orphans. Through his efforts, a revolution in England was halted. Because his preaching touched many hearts, souls were transformed from sinners to what we would call saints. He said because you now believe, do as Jesus would do, have compassion on the lost, help the needy, be Jesus' hands, his feet, his eyes, his ears, his mouth showing the love of God to others. He worked on the people to remember at least three things about

their faith, “Do good. Do no harm. Love God.” Hmm...I think I’ve heard of that some place. Oh there it is as part of our mission statement, not our Conferences, or denomination but ours, found on the back of your bulletin.... Would you read it with me? “The Williamsville United Methodist Church is a caring community of believers who believe in Jesus Christ and His mission to evangelize the world. Our Goal is to “Do no Harm. Do Good. Stay in love with God.”

The Message translation that Donna read is pretty clear about what the community of faithful should be like. Let me read just part of it again... “Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.” It brings to mind Frank Sinatra’s song, “Love and Marriage, goes together like a horse and carriage.”

James says you need salvation faith in order to get to heaven. You need working faith to disciple others and reach out to those who are lost and those who are hurting. Look at what was accomplished when the disciples were full of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They were in the streets proclaiming the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and then they opened their homes and shared their food with others. God continued to add to their numbers daily, not those who were looking for a free hand-out, but those who were being saved. Faith and works, working hand in hand. One is not more important than the other, they work together.

But that isn't the end. The second thing the community of faith does is to spread the **hope of the gospel**. Listen as Donna reads from the Book of Romans **15:13**

Hope is looking at a child and not seeing all his faults, but what he or she could be. Just imagine what might have happened if Helen Keller's teacher, Ann Sullivan, ever gave up on her. Helen being blind, not hearing nor speak could have ended up in a place where people were sent to waste away, to be set aside as a wasted life. But her parents tried to get her help. And this young teacher tried and tried, cried and cried when all hope seemed to dash until one day out at the old water pump she pumped gushes of water over and over into the hands of Helen and spelled 'w-a-t-e-r' over and over again while Helen tried her best to pull her hand away and run to her safe house. Don't know how long it took, maybe just one more pumping of water, one more spelling the word in Helen's hand until Ann sat down exhausted, discouraged with tears in her eyes ready to give up, ready to write Helen Keller off. But then God intervened....that my thinking. For after some minutes Helen reached over, touched the water, touched Ann's hand and spelled back to her the word 'water' and that opened the flood gates to knowledge for the teacher to teach her many things. Helen Keller went on to earn many degrees and made great strides and spoke to others of the blessed hope to never give up on yourself, or on others even if they are handicapped. Let me read something I found written by Helen Keller:

## **The Helen Keller Story**

They took away what should have been my eyes  
(But I remembered Milton's Paradise).  
They took away what should have been my ears,  
(Beethoven came and wiped away my tears).  
They took away what should have been my tongue,  
(But I had talked with God when I was young).  
He would not let them take away my soul -  
Possessing that, I still possess the whole.

-Helen Keller

Hope is looking at a glass as half full, not looking at it as being half empty. We don't look to the future with fear, but with hope. We don't look at the failures of the past, but learn from them and hope we don't make the same mistakes again. We hope for a better world where there is peace, acceptance and caring people. We hope for a time when there is no more violence, no wars, no more hunger. We hope for a better world for our kids and grandkids, a world and country where people can get along with each other, where greed is gone and where we can stand side-by-side with one another singing together the songs of our faith as we did last Sunday under

The tents. People out of work hope that tomorrow they will find that job. People struggle with addiction hope that this will be the day they can kick the habit.

Paul says, "May the God of green hope fill you with joy, fill you with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim with hope!" Community of faith we can do it....we can change the world.....one person at a

time....we just have to have faith and hope in the one who calls us to do it, Jesus Christ for if we trust Him, he will show us how.

Later in his writing to the Romans he said, “For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Peter writes to the church “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Finally, as a community of faith we have **love to share**. Listen to Donna once again as she shares our final words from a letter from John. **1Jn3:16-18**

I love that last verse that seems to sum it all up. “My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice **real** love.”

How amazing and what insight the apostle John had. But we need to remember how he came to understand love. He came to know it through his relationship with his Savior. He saw real love in action everyday he was with Jesus. He saw real love through his compassion to help the needy. He saw it when he brought a little girl back to life and told her parents to feed her. He saw it as he mingled with the lepers who were walking on the other side of the street, while the disciples shied away from them. He saw it when Jesus touched the blind and they saw again. He saw the love of Jesus as he fed thousands

instead of sending them home hungry. He saw the gift of love at Calvary as Jesus was crucified for the sins of the whole world. He felt it himself when Jesus told him to watch over his mother, and told his mother to take care of him like a son. He saw it when he forgave Thomas for doubting, and forgave Peter for his denials. He saw what real love was like when Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to them and blessed the wine and said, “Do this often to remember my great love for you and the world.”

Today we use the word ‘love’ for a variety of things. You are invited out to dinner and you respond, ‘I’d love to go.’ Someone is dressed up and looks great and may hear, ‘you look lovely.’ We love this great movie or this great book. We love this place to eat or that one. We use that word so loosely that sometimes it feels like it lost its meaning. That’s why in the Greek language of the New Testament you find 3 different words translated for the word ‘love.’ One describes a relationship between a man and woman and the love they share. We know that as erotic love. Then there is the friendship love that one has for a friend that is where the town of Philadelphia got its name, meaning the city of brotherly love. And then there is the best love of all found in the Greek word, ‘Agape.’ This is a higher love that goes beyond any other love. And that’s the love John talks about having for one another. It is a love far reaching than any other. It’s not a love that wants something in return, it’s a love extended because God has commanded us to love. Jesus commanded “Love one another as I have loved you.” And of course we know John 3:16

because it tells us how much God loves us because he sent his son to die in order that we might have life.

You see, the greatest love that one could have was offered the day Jesus went to the cross. Because he loved his Father and loved you and me He came to give his life taking all the suffering of all the sins in the world past, present, and future upon himself in order to give us a new life. And that's why we say no greater love can be shown than when someone dies for you.

Recently the sons of a man received this nation's highest honor, the Medal of Honor. For many years this man could not be recognized because of the secret mission he was on. But I guess we could say the time limit expired and he was honored for his heroism. When his small group came under attack during their mission he got them all to safety, taking care of the wounded, keeping fire upon the enemy while the helicopter took each of his friends to safety. In doing this, staying to be the last on the ground, he was killed. He literally gave himself up so others, his buddies, his close friends, could live.

We've heard similar stories. We call it bravery. But some might even call it love, sacrificing one's life for a buddy just as Jesus did.

As you can see, John understood what it was to practice real love. He was now the last of the original disciples, sitting on an island, put there to die so he could not continue

to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, though others thought the Christian movement would come to an end, through the encouraging letters of Paul, Peter, James, and of course these letters of John, plus the story of what is to come in the book of Revelation, the love of God continues on. The story that transforms lives lives. “He lives, he lives, Salvation to impart...you ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart” we sing at Easter time and perhaps we need to sing it more often.

We today are the community of faith that needs to continue to carry on the work our God has called us to do. We need to put our faith into action.

Then the community of faith needs to have hoped knowing the seeds of faith we plant will help lives to change. Each missionary from the time of Paul has had the hope that those who have heard the gospel call will respond. They cry out, “Tell us the stories of Jesus and his love.” Scripture tells us, we have a great hope in knowing that one day when the trumpet sounds, and the angels descend, out of heaven Jesus will come to take us home. Paul, getting closer to the end of his life, writes to Titus “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

And finally the community of faith is one who practices real love. We don't do it for gain, we do it because we not only are commanded to do so by God, but it is the right thing to do because true love, my friends will cast out fear. True love will overtake anger. True love tackles the ugliness in this world.

This morning the women of this church celebrate United Methodist Women Sunday where we have honored people who have walked by their faith in Jesus Christ, have looked to the future with hope and who have practiced loving others. We salute all UMW units around the world who are a community of faith who come together to 'know God, to support each other, and to support the missions of the church.

As a community of faith, we the church, are called as well 'to know God, to support one another, and to support the missions of Jesus Christ to 'go make disciples.'

Paul, in that great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 states, "So these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love."

So shall it be for the community of faith gathered here this morning. Let the community of faith shout a rousing, 'amen!'