

Sermon May 18th, 2025

*The Mantra to Being a Healthy Community:
Love One Another As I Have Loved You!*

Unfortunately,

at one time or another...

we have probably experienced...

what it is like...

to be part...

of an unhealthy community.

For example,

you attended a school...

where you experienced...

a lot of bullying.

Or your home environment growing up...

was an unsafe place to be.

Or you felt judged,
because your parents,
your peers,
didn't understand you.

Or you were part of a sports community...
where you witnessed a lot of favouritism,
and abuse from parents.

Or you worked in an office...
with abusive people...
or people who didn't respect your boundaries.

Or you were part of a community group...
or church...
where it seemed like the conflict...
was never ending...

between people within the community.

A lot of fighting and gossip.

A lack of communication.

Poor leadership.

Division.

Or you were part of a community group or church...

that had a lot of rules...

that made it difficult for people to fit in.

That made it hard for you...

to be welcoming to others.

At one time or another...

we have experienced...

what it is like...

to be part of an unhealthy community.

And it's not fun.

We usually become the worst parts of ourselves.

We get angry a lot.

We have these annoying outbursts.

We feel like we are constantly walking on eggshells.

Our stomachs are queasy.

We feel miserable most of the time.

It's not a good way to live our lives.

And I have to believe...

that God wants better for us.

How can we be the loving hospitable people...

God calls us to be...

if we are carrying around...

all this junk inside of us?

In our reading in the book of Acts this morning,

we see that...

Peter is struggling with the idea...

of sharing a meal...

with this Gentile family...

he is visiting,

because of some of the dietary laws...

within his tradition.

Sitting at the table...

and sharing in the food...

that is there...

is a significant act of hospitality,

and if one chooses to refrain from this,

it can be perceived...

as an act of inhospitality.

Peter wants to be the loving hospitable person...

God has created him to be...

but also recognizes...

that he is part of a community...

that has some strongly defined rules in place...

around sharing food with Gentiles.

As Peter is wrestling with this dilemma,

he has a vision...

where he sees...

that God is inviting him...

to sit at their table...

and eat of the food they offer.

And so,

what Peter takes from this vision...

is that our invitation to be hospitable to others,

to love one another...

as God loves us...

is foundational to our identity...

as children of God,

as followers of Christ.

And if one of the rules...

within the community...

makes it hard for us...

to live out this hospitality...

then we need to re-evaluate this rule,

seeing it through the eyes...

of the resurrected Christ.

Where our rules and guidelines...

are meant to help us love one another,

not become a barrier...

in our capacity to love one another.

In our gospel,

Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples,

and as he is ready to leave them...

to carry on the community...

he has established,

he wants to leave them...

with words of wisdom...

to help guide them...

into being a healthy community.

Where people love one another.

Care for each other.

Where everyone feels safe.

Where everyone is treated fairly.

Where everyone feels valued and listened to.

Therefore,

creating a harmonious environment...

to live in.

This is what Jesus envisions the church to be.

This is what Jesus envisions the world to be.

A community...

where we love one another...

like Jesus loves us.

A community...

where we show hospitality to one another.

Eating at each other's tables.

Working together...

to reveal God's love to the world.

Fortunately,

though,

we do have experiences...

of what it is like...

to live in an unhealthy community,

we also have experiences...

of what it is like...

to live in a healthy community.

Where we feel safe.

Where we feel valued.

Listened to.

Loved.

Where we have fun.

Where we feel healthy.

Where we practice hospitality...

to everyone we meet.

Where we are willing to re-evaluate our rules...

and traditions...

when they prevent us...

from being the loving hospitable people...

we are called to be.

Where we deal with conflict in healthy ways.

By communicating with each other...

and holding people accountable...

when they are speaking...

or acting in abusive ways.

Where we challenge those...

who choose to bully.

Setting healthy boundaries...

that keep people safe.

Where we offer programs and supports...

for families...

who are struggling.

Where we love one another...

as Jesus loves us.

This is the community...

Jesus envisions us to be.

This is the community...

we are invited to be part of.

And when we find ourselves...

living in a healthy community,

we see the best parts of ourselves come alive.

We are inspired and empowered by this love...

to be loving and hospitable to others.

Amen.

Sermon May 25th, 2025

God's Presence Is Vital to Our Wellbeing

In my last year of high school,

my Opa passed away.

As tragic as that was,

I ended up spending a lot more time...

with my Oma.

Helping my dad take care of her.

We became really close.

I ended up going to university...

near where she lived,

and so,

stopped by often to see her.

Well, one afternoon...

when I was on my way to her house.

I entered a two-lane traffic circle...

near where she lived.

Of course,

I needed to go all the way around...

to the last possible exit...

to get on the road...

to her house.

There were two semi trucks...

that entered the traffic circle...

while I was driving in it.

One ended up cutting into my lane...

sending me into the curb.

Then as I was sitting there...

trying to catch my breath,

another one almost drove right through me.

Fortunately, my instincts kicked in,

and at the last second,

I stepped on the gas...

and avoided getting hit.

When I arrived at my Oma's house,

she told me that...

I looked like I had just seen a ghost.

I was so shaken up...

by this near fatal experience.

But seeing and hugging my Oma...

really calmed me down.

Her presence meant everything to me...

in that moment.

Whenever we find ourselves...

in an anxiety ridden situation...

like the one I found myself in,

we often seek out someone's presence...

that reassures us...

that we will be able to...

make it through this anxiety ridden situation.

That everything is going to be okay.

It could be a grandparent,

a parent,

a sibling,

another family member,

a friend,

a spouse,

a partner,

a child,

a pastor,

another trusted adult like a teacher.

For example,

your parent has passed away.

And your spouse/partner has been a solid rock for you...

and your family...

as you deal with the grief,

and all the other meticulous things...

you have to deal with.

Or your friend sits with you all night...

listening to you lament...

as you deal with the breakup...

of a relationship.

Or you fall down...

and scrape your knee...

and feel comfort...

when crying in the arms...

of your parent or grandparent.

Who holds you tight.

Reassuring you...

that everything is going to be okay.

Or your teacher comes to your aid...

when you struggle with a math problem.

Or you feel at peace...

when the pastor...

or another member of the congregation...

walks into your hospital room.

Whenever we find ourselves...

in an anxiety ridden situation,

we look for someone's stabilizing presence...

who will help us...

get through the situation.

Who will reassure us...

that everything is going to be okay.

In the book of Acts,

in Paul's letters,

we see that...

as Paul ministers to the Gentile communities...

across the Mediterranean...

it is vital for him...

to feel God's presence.

Paul is walking into unknown places,

which can cause a lot of anxiety.

Paul doesn't know...

what he is going to face.

Paul needs to know...

that wherever he is being sent,

that God is there...

working in the hearts of those...

he encounters...

to receive the gospel...

with hospitality.

That God is already present.

In the book of Revelation,

as the church faces persecution...

from the Empire.

In our own context,

where we see...

that our planet is burning up,

and that the powers...

that can make the changes necessary...

to save the planet...

are not doing so.

We hear the comforting and hopeful words of John...

that remind us...

that God dwells among us.

And that God will redeem not only humanity,

but all of creation...

from this suffering we are witnessing.

When we face persecution.

When we face...

the devastating impacts of climate change.

It is vital for our wellbeing...

that we feel...

God's comforting and redeeming presence.

As Jesus prepares the disciples hearts...

for his impending departure,

a question burns within their minds.

How do we continue to feel God's presence Jesus...

if you are no longer here?

During this Easter season...

we bear witness to the resurrected Christ.

But the ascension is coming.

And the disciples are thinking,

“If we are going to carry on Christ’s teachings.

If we are going to continue to be the church.

We need to feel Christ’s presence.

That Christ is still with us in some way.”

In response to this question,

Jesus reassures them/us...

that though he will depart soon,

the Holy Spirit,

their/our advocate...

will continue to reflect God’s presence...

in our lives.

We see this in the church today,

as the Holy Spirit works in and through us...

to continue God's work in our communities,

revealing to the people we encounter,

as well as,

to ourselves,

that God is very much present...

in our lives...

and in our world...

healing and redeeming it/us.

Whether it is sharing in a meal...

over at St. Andrew's Memorial...

with those in our community...

that don't have access to food...

in the same way we do.

Or receiving a visit from someone in our church...

when we are laid up in a hospital bed...

or isolated in a senior home.

Whether it is walking with those...

in the annual Pride Parade...

who often face judgment, rejection,

and discrimination for who they are.

Helping them feel supported and valued.

Reassuring them that they are not alone.

Or sitting at coffee hour with someone...

listening to them lament...

about the struggles...

they are having at home.

Whether it is Lutherans, Anglicans...

across the country...

standing with Indigenous communities...

on parliament hill...

peacefully challenging the government...

to do more...

to deal with the lack of access...

to clean drinking water on reserves...

like we did in Ottawa in 2013.

Or Christian leaders showing up to the national events...

that were being offered across the country...

to listen to the stories of survivors...

of the residential schools.

Showing our support, compassion,

and intention to act to...

work to change the systems...

that have hurt the Indigenous people of this land.

We see through the actions of our church,

of the Holy Spirit,

that God is very much present in our lives...

and in our community.

And so,

as we continue in this Easter season,

preparing our hearts and minds...

for the day of Pentecost,

the day where we commemorate...

the reception of this promise...

of the gift of the Holy Spirit,

we also,

live now in the Easter promise.

Where through the witness of the resurrected Christ...

we see that death is no longer a barrier...

between God and us.

In fact, as Jesus says to his disciples,

to us at the end of the gospel of Matthew.

“I am with you always.”

Amen.