

## Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Spiritual Growth Part 4: Fellowship, Growing in Grace Together**

September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Luke 15:1-10, Romans 12:1-8**

### 1. Home for Lost & Found Sheep

- **Jesus the Good Shepherd, and our most important task**

- Jesus was accused by religious leaders and experts in Old Testament laws, **"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them"** Luke 15:2 NIV
- His response? A parable about "lost sheep" (sinners) and how heaven rejoices when one sinner repents, concluding: **"there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."** Luke 15:7 NIV
- The instructions Jesus left for us, his disciples, is to **"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** Matthew 28:19 NIV

This has been called the Great Commission. *It is the most important task of all disciples of Christ (all Christians) and the Church.*

- **Making disciples** is the business of
  - **finding and rescuing "lost sheep"** or sinners who repent and come to Christ. Typically involves sharing the good news of salvation in Christ.
  - **Feeding Jesus' lambs and sheep - this is evidence of our love for God.** Jesus challenged Peter three times in John 21,
    - "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
    - To Simon's "Yes" response, Jesus said,
      - "Feed my lambs"
      - "Take care of my sheep"
      - "Feed my sheep"

- **Feeding Lambs and Sheep**

We know that everyone who becomes a Christian is “born again” spiritually and is a spiritual baby or “lamb”. We all need to grow into maturity in Christ, to be sanctified (be made holy), to grow in love, etc. **This is best done in a spiritual home - the church.**

- **Recall: Spiritual Growth is growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ**

We are instructed to:

**“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

2 Peter 3:18 NRSV

- Paul urges us,

“brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 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.”

Romans 12:1-2 NIV

This is a gradual work of sanctification accomplished by the grace of God. But this is not something that an individual Christian can attain alone - we need each other, as Paul shows in the verses that follow.

## **2. The Church and Fellowship: Growing Lambs and Sheep**

The spiritual life in the Church is such that we always have of mixture of Christians at different stages of growth. Some are babies, some are adolescents, and some are mature adults.

**Each of us has a measure of grace given to us.** When we come together in fellowship, we each bring the grace given to us. Each sharing the grace they have results in our steady growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ.

“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.

For **just as each of us has one body with many members,** and these members do not all have the same function, **so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.** “ Romans 12:3-4 NIV

The Church is likened to a body made up of members, each with a different function. All members fulfilling their functions builds and sustains the whole body.

Thus, the church is a place of nurture, support, and motivation to help us live for God and accomplish our God given commission to make disciples.

- **A Place of Nurture**

We use our God-granted graces to nurture and build each other up.

**"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;**

if it is serving, then serve;

if it is teaching, then teach;

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."

Romans 8:4-8 NIV

We see this in the early church

**"42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 **All who believed were together and had all things in common;** 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 **Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,** 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

**And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."** Acts 2:42-47 NRSV

- **A Place of Support**

We are to encourage and support each other to stay faithful to Christ.

The writer of Hebrews compares Jesus with Moses, and instructs us:

**“Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.**

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the wilderness,

9 where your ancestors tested and tried me,

though for forty years they saw what I did.

10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said,

‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’

11 So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

12 **See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”**

Hebrews 3:6-12 NIV

- **A Place of Motivation**

We are each called to fulfil a purpose that God had in mind for us when we became Christians:

**“For we are God’s handiwork,  
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

Ephesians 2:10 NIV

*We need to motivate each other to accomplished what we are called to do:*

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. **And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** Hebrews 10:23-25 NRSV