

"Choosing Community Over Isolation"

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Intro.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said in *Birth of a New Age*, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

When Sandra was at her lowest point, she felt alone. But as she began the hard work to emerge from addiction on a journey to wholeness, she found a faithful community of individuals who each contributed different gifts to support her. One person helped her through the recovery process. Another sparked her dream of owning a home. Another helped her navigate the homebuying process. Financial gifts like those made through the Human Relations Day Sunday offering support the work of the Better Community Development Programs that journeyed with Sandra. And of course, she worked and planned and through all of it, God gave her the courage and determination to live into her potential.

So much is possible when we claim our God-given gifts and join with others who have different gifts to build up God's people. Too often we allow ourselves to fall into bickering, division, and self-righteous rhetoric. And while it is important to address

systems and principalities that breed injustice, it is equally important to build on our strengths and create networks of transformational love.

The Bible context.

Let's remember that the book of Acts is the narrative account of the early church. The new interpreters Study Bible mentions. *In today's bible passage we can see that it is not only an idyllic portrait of life in the first Christian communities, but it also offers an ideal to which believers aspire.*

Theological Reflection.

In the book Sapiens – A Brief History of Humankind, author Yuval Noah Harari provides a captivating view on the development of the human species.

The author wrote that prior to the Industrial Revolution, the daily life of most humans ran its course within three ancient frames: the nuclear family, the extended family, and the local intimate community. What I can see in this short portion of the book is that humans have always been developed in community, the church is not the exemption, we are here to extend our relationships with all people and show them with our lives how it is to have faith and live with God in our hearts.

Yes, dear church as Christians we are called to Holding fast to the teachings of the Christian gospel and tradition. We are in the world also to exercise Christian fellowship (Koinonia) which entails both spiritual communion and the sharing of resources for the good of the church. And as we just read in the book of Acts, we are also encouraged to

the practice of the Sacraments, the baptism and the Lord's Supper. And the development of a personal and communal spirituality. (The practice of prayer). But it is also crucial to understand that all of this means something bigger than the church. God loves is manifested through all of us to express Jesus's presence in the world

Our church consultant Paul Nixon states that: People are as starved for meaningful community today as at any other time in human history. Some things just come with being human. Churches that provide meaningful community typically pack out their house and often return folks in large numbers to the world in various forms of community service.

That's why it is crucial that we all believe that the presence of our church in the community needs to be more than a historical presence of a beautiful building that is part of the registered historic.

Conclusion.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote, "I continue to dream about a revival that creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit." As individuals, on our own, none of us has the capacity to "save the world." Only God can do that. But working together and with our gifts infused with the Holy Spirit to strive for "the common good," our lives and the lives of others can be transformed.

We see what is possible in Sandra's story—a woman whose life was transformed through the faithfulness of a network of differently gifted people. They each shared their uniqueness to journey alongside her. We see the change that is possible in our own congregation when we work together for the common good.

Application.

Dear Church God has put His eyes upon us. I am convinced that God can do wonders through us! But we need to choose to get connected with our neighbors. We must choose community over the religious isolation of a weekly spiritual exercise!

If we are willing and open to interact with our community, I'm sure we can open more possibilities to develop more meaningful relationships.

We need to identify who are our neighbors. It is easy to remember that we have at least three points where we can find connections with people. The Unity Point Hospital. The Hawthorne Hill apartments. The Main frame Studios.

We are called to share the good news of Jesus to everyone, but we must be wise enough so we can expand our ministry by using the tools that we have at our reach.

We are in this together, friends. When one of us is hurting, we all hurt. And when we stop worrying about what just impacts “me,” and see that Jesus calls us to care for all humanity, we can be part of creating the beloved community in partnership with God and with our neighbor.

What is the gift that the Spirit is ready to unleash through you? How will you strive to build God’s kin-dom, the whole family of God? Will you nurture and strengthen your gift and join it with others’ to lift up this community so that as a church, we can touch neighborhoods around the world? Today we have the opportunity to present our financial gifts to be used for a common good through our The United Methodist Church’s Human Relations Day offering. We know how systemic inequality affects the most vulnerable people. When neighbors experience poverty and live in communities that have limited to resources, as a denomination, our gifts on Human Relations Day work together to empower faith-based volunteer programs, Community Developers and programs that work with at-risk teens. I encourage you to give generously.

I encourage our church to choose community over isolation. Amen!