

First Congregational Church of Royal Oak  
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 01, 2021

First Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16  
Gospel: N/A

*“Believers are never told to become one; we already are one and are expected to act like it. Joni Eareckson Tada*

## **Bound Together**

Our daughter played flute and piccolo in her high school marching band for four years. The past ten years, she has been the flute and piccolo instructor for that same high school. In all that time, I am still amazed at the level of talent and dexterity each year’s show entails.

Not only do each of these students need to learn how to play their instrument, learn the music, and then memorize the music, they also have to learn and memorize a marching routine. They get a large packet of papers with a bunch of dots on each page and each marcher needs to highlight one specific dot on each of those pages. They are that dot and need to emulate that dot’s movement through the entire program. Sometimes that means marching backwards on an angle in the exact beat and footstep length needed to keep the movement correct all while still playing the correct notes and holding their instrument at the proper position. (Ex: no limp flutes.)

When they march onto that field, they are one band playing one song and following one routine. They are still each unique individuals playing their unique notes for their instruments and following their own dot on the page, but together they create music and artistry. If any individual plays too loud or missteps, it affects the entire band. It truly is no small feat.

That is how Paul is calling the church to live its faith. The church in Ephesus is a church of Gentiles that is now bound together to each other through the Holy Spirit, but also to the churches in other locations. We take that idea for granted, but this was a foreign concept in that time and culture. Jews and Gentiles who are now Christians are bound together when they used to be enemies. The rich are bound to the poor. Free people are bound to slaves. Men are bound to women. The Spirit of God unites all who follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

This binding goes beyond living in covenant with each other. We are bound by the Spirit, yes, to each other, but also to the people down the street at Shrine of the Little Flower or up the road with the church of Starr Presbyterian or across the street with the church of Unity - Royal Oak. We don’t get to choose who we are bound to – that’s the Spirit’s choosing.

If Paul were here among us, he might say, “Listen, there is no Congregational Jesus or United Methodist God, or Catholic Holy Spirit – there is one body of Christ, one Spirit, one Lord, one baptism. You all are the ones trying to divide what God’s Spirit has already united.

Elsewhere when he writes to the church at Corinth, Paul will remind that church that what they do doesn’t just affect themselves but affects the entire church. When one member hurts the

entire body of Christ is hurting. When one member is built up, the entire body is built up. We are **bound** together – whether we like it or not.

Unity, however, is not uniformity. Not all the instruments in that band are flutes. God's creative diversity is our strength. Instead of tearing each other apart because we don't think alike or worship in a way we understand, we should celebrate our diverse reflection of God so that all may find a home in which to worship and live out their faith with others in community.

Now, that doesn't mean we cannot or should not call out bad behavior done in the name of God. But too often we are so busy looking down our noses at different ways of being church that we fail to see those searching who we turn away. First: because we are telling them they cannot belong here unless they fit into a box of our own making. And second: because people don't want to be involved with the drama created in church communities.

Paul is begging the church, us, to lead our lives in a way that is worthy to our calling by Jesus to follow in his footsteps. "Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." So, let me ask you: When was the last time you worked at bringing unity among people of different denominations or even within this community? Or do you gossip and undermine decisions you don't agree with or people you dislike, or make fun of traditions that are not your own?

Even Paul, who begins with talking about unity, acknowledges this diversity. No one person has all the gifts of God. Some are prophets, some are apostles, some are pastors and teachers, some are music directors, some are Christian Education directors, but we all work to together for one single purpose. To equip the saints, all of you, for the work of ministry.

We come together on Sunday morning to prepare ourselves to live our faith out in the world – to do the work of ministry. Someone once told me that coming to church on Sunday is like being in the locker room at half-time with the coach bolstering you up to go back out onto the field and win the game. We don't do the ministry of the church – you do.

Paul letter is, however gently, calling us out on our bad behavior and is pretty direct. He reminds us that we are no longer children bounced to and fro; it is time to grow up and embrace the work that God has called you to do as one individual member within the larger Body of Christ. Without your work in the world, the whole body suffers. The Body of Christ needs what you bring to it.

And we are to speak the truth we have come to understand in love. We don't speak that truth in anger, or selfishness, or arrogance, or fear, or ridicule, or control. We speak it only in love. We take care to choose our words carefully as they can wound like nothing else can. Speaking the truth in love doesn't mean we cut people off at the knees with our words demanding our way or trying to create another person into our image or jamming them into a box of our making. Again, turning to Corinthians –

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love*

*does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails*

Does this describe the words you choose? Are your words patient and kind – not envious or boastful?

We are one church, and Paul is calling us to start living that way. We at FCC should care about all Boards and all people in this church community – not just our little corner in it. We all should care about all church communities, about all Christians – because the Spirit has bound us all together one to another. We don't survive without each other.

Paul is no longer playing games with the Body of Christ – with us. It's time to grow up and live the truth of being united one to another. We do not live alone the song of the Spirit or the artistry of God's continual love for all creation. We need each other – always. When we go back onto the field to do the ministry we have been called to do, we do it as one church, one Body of Christ, in the name of one God.

Amen.