

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

*For the united worship service of Northwest and Encuentro, delivered in Spanish and English

The Ties that Bind / Los Lazos que Unen

(Selected passages from the New Testament)

Introduction:

Ever since childhood, I've been fascinated with ropes and knots. I've loved tying knots since I learned some basic knots when I was a Boy Scout as a kid.

Over the years, knot-tying has proven most helpful when I've had to tie certain knots when I go on camping trips.

The right knot is important when you're tying off tent stakes or when you're hanging a food bag from a tree limb to protect food from critters.

The right knots are REALLY important when a mountain climber is going up a sheer rock wall.

When he's hanging on by his finger nails on the side of a mountain, good knot-tying is a matter of life and death.

If that climber loses his or her grip, the only protection from a long fall is knots he or she tied in the rope. And, if it is a group climb, teammates.

On a group climb, the team moves up the mountain together.

If one team member slips, that person's weight is supported by the group. The lives of the climbers depend on the ties that bind them.

And THAT is a great description of life in the church.

We are here to support each other. We are linked to each other by God's Spirit. We are to catch each other when we fall.

Scattered throughout the New Testament, all under the heading of "one another," are descriptions of HOW we are to support each other.

In the church, we are to comfort one another, exhort and admonish one another, forgive and submit to one another.

We are NOT to judge, envy or brag to one another.

When we "**one another**" one another as the Bible tells us to, we strengthen the ties that bind us.

This morning, Manuel and I are going to key in on three particular "one anothers."

First, encouragement. And to learn about encouragement, we're going to look at a world-class encourager.

Encouraging One Another

A world-class encourager: Joseph/Barnabas

Joseph's backstory

His name was Joseph, but his nickname was "Barnabas" (the Son of Encouragement). Barnabas was among the earliest followers of Jesus. He was a Jew and he was a wealthy man.

The Bible tells us a couple of stories that let us see how he earned his encouraging nickname.

Joseph's encouraging ways

Sharing material goods (Acts 4:32-37)

In the book of Acts, we learn that the wealthier disciples of Jesus would sell possessions to help the poor. They would bring the proceeds of the sale to the apostles, who would distribute to those in need.

That's a great picture of loving generosity, and Joseph was right in the middle of it.

He sold a tract of land and brought the money to the apostles. They gave the proceeds of the land sale to serve the poor.

What an encouraging thing to do!

It encouraged the poor, whose needs were met.
It encouraged the wealthy, giving them an example to follow.
It encouraged the whole church, who saw the Body of Christ at work.

A bit later, Barnabas shows us another side of encouragement.

Outrageously welcoming hospitality (Acts 9)

Before Paul was an apostle of Jesus, he was a violent persecutor of the church.

But then, after a blinding encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he became convinced that Jesus was the Son of God - and he became a passionate Christian.

Some of the early Christians hear Paul's testimony, but they suspected that he was faking faith.

They thought he was just pretending to be a Christian so that he could find out who the real Christians were and arrest them.

Now, we know that Paul really was a Christian. And we know that he simply wanted to have Christian friends.

But none of the disciples in Jerusalem would have anything to do with Paul. Nobody was willing to take a step toward Paul - except Barnabas.

Enter Barnabas...

Barnabas took a great risk and approached Paul. He grabbed him. He embraced him with open arms and welcomed him.

Barnabas was never more truly a "Son of Encouragement" than right here when he sponsored Paul.

That's what encouragers do. They take risks. They love boldly.

The Northwest and Encuentro story is now over two and a half years long. Over that time, we've experienced lots of Barnabas moments.

I've seen it working both ways as gracious hospitality has flowed and as sacrificial generosity has flowed. There are lots of great, encouraging things to rejoice over.

But, there is a phrase that occurs a couple of times in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, who were also doing really well. He told them, "**Excel still more.**" (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10)

Let's be more like Barnabas and look for ways to be more outrageously hospitable to each other.

Let's be more like Barnabas and welcome the one who is on the outside looking in.

Let's be more like Barnabas and be more sensitive to the person or to the family in need and lavish generosity on them in Jesus' Name.

Let's unleash a flood of risky, loving, sacrificial encouragement here!

And then let's serve one another.

Serve One Another

A “Greatness Indicator” From Jesus (Mark 10:32-45)

Watch Jesus. He’s walking south to Jerusalem for the last time. He’s going to Jerusalem to die on the cross for our sins. On the road, He realized He had a mess on His hands.

Two of His disciples (James and John) were asking if they could have the seats of honor in the coming kingdom; the other ten disciples were indignant that the two had asked Jesus the question.

So, Jesus called them all together and explained that the mark of those who follow Him is not domination. It’s service. Even Jesus, their Leader, was a Servant.

[Mark 10:45] For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Jesus had every right to be served. And He gave up every right He ever had to meet our every need.

For churches, like ours, Jesus says that greatness is all about following His lead into servanthood.

And He didn’t just say it. He lived it.

A few days after this interaction on the road, we find Jesus again with His disciples. This time, they are in Jerusalem in the upper room of a home.

A Foot-Washing Lord (John 13:1-17)

During the Last Supper, which Jesus and His disciples ate on the night before He died, He did something that needed to be done. But it was something no one expected Him to do.

During the day time hours of that Thursday, the disciples went to the market in Jerusalem to get supplies and to buy food for the Passover. They did lots of walking on the city streets in open sandals.

They walked through lots of dirt and grime. There was garbage between their sweaty toes.

We don’t really even want to imagine the state of the feet of these guys in that upper room on that night.

They needed their feet washed.

So, in the middle of supper, Jesus - the Leader - removed His outer garment and wrapped Himself with a towel.

He pulled out a basin, filled it with water and began to wash His disciples dirty, smelly feet. (John 13)

After this foot-washing, Jesus spoke to His disciples.

He told them that what He had just done for them - wash their feet - they were to do for each other.

Over the centuries, lots of Christian groups have used foot-washing as a symbolic act of servanthood. And there’s nothing wrong with that!

But I believe that by this foot-washing, Jesus was saying that in whatever way is needed, we who follow Jesus are to serve each other.

Northwest is a church that is learning to celebrate cultural distinctives.

The presence of both Encuentro and English as a Second Language classes have brought many, many cultures our way - and the cultural variety is delightful!

These distinctives offer us all great opportunities to serve each other.

And we have served each other in many ways. We can do more. Again, we can ***“excel still more.”***

We can serve each other in “soft” ways, with warm greetings and attentive listening.

We can grow in cultural intelligence and sensitivity.

We can learn that “different” doesn’t mean “wrong” and that “my way” isn’t necessarily the “better way.”

And, we can serve each other in “hard, concrete ways”, too.

- Care for babies and toddlers in our nursery.
- Help shepherd the children who are growing up at our church.
- Join the team that is leading teenagers.
- Pour into the lives of college aged and older young adults.
- Join a Care Group where you can love and be loved, know and be known, serve and be served, and reach out together in Jesus’ Name.

We can be on the lookout for life’s storms. Watch for things like job losses and sicknesses, and for family challenges.

When you see the storms hit, offer to help. Offer baby-sitting. Provide a meal. Sit in the hospital room.

These are all the kinds of things Jesus had in mind when He told us to wash each others’ feet.

This is what it means in 2018 to pull out the basin and drag out the towel and wash feet. Just like Jesus did.

So, we are to encourage and we are to serve.

The final “one another” we’ll consider today is another essential. It’s the matter of prayer.

Pray for One Another

The Church at Prayer

What were the early disciples doing, before the day of Pentecost when they were waiting for the Holy Spirit’s arrival?

All one hundred and twenty of them, **[1:14]...with one mind were continually devoting themselves to PRAYER...**

What were the first Christians doing after the Holy Spirit fell and after thousands had placed their faith in Christ after Peter’s first sermon?

The Bible tells us that they **[2:42]...were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to PRAYER.**

What did the church’s first leaders say would be their primary calling? They said that they would, **[6:4] “[devote themselves] to PRAYER and to the ministry of the Word.”**

When the leaders of a church in the Syrian city of Antioch were seeking God’s direction for ministry, they prayed and they fasted.

The Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul/Paul to a great work. And then we read this:

[3]...when they had fasted and PRAYED and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

And then, years later, when the much older Apostle Paul was about to leave the city of Tyre to go to Jerusalem to face certain persecution, they prayed.

A big group of men, women, and children walked with Paul to the Mediterranean coast, and **[Acts 21:5]...After kneeling down on the beach and PRAYING, we said farewell to one another.**

The early church prayed WITH each other and they prayed FOR each other. Going before God in prayer together united them, empowered and equipped them.

Prayer was the language that strengthened the ties that bound them.

You and Me at Prayer

It is a major biblical theme that Jesus’ followers will pray for each other. It would be abnormal for us to NOT pray for each other.

That is the way it's always been. You should be able to trust that your friends in Christ are praying for you.

It is a great thing to pray FOR and WITH each other. And God will use your prayers FOR and WITH your fellow Christ-followers.

God will see to it that your prayers strengthen them when they are weak.

You are praying FOR and WITH "one another" now. Great. And you and I can "*excel still more*" when it comes to prayer, too.

So, here's what I want to urge us all to learn to do.

When someone mentions a personal need, don't tell them you're going to pray for them.

Ask if they are OK if you pray for them.

If they say, "Yes", RIGHT THEN put your hand on their shoulder and pray. It doesn't have to be a long prayer. Twenty seconds, thirty second is great.

That prayer makes its way straight to God. That prayer strengthens your friend. The Holy Spirit will use that prayer to create a culture of prayer, and out of that culture of prayer, unity and purpose and vision will grow.

Conclusion:

When we ENCOURAGE and SERVE and PRAY FOR each other, we are fulfilling Jesus' New Commandment - "Love one another."

And love binds us together, just like love binds us to God.

All through the Bible, God declares His love for us. He shouts His love for us from Genesis to Revelation.

But He hasn't just said it. He sent Jesus to show it.

Jesus spent the last three years of His life loving those around Him. He spent the last six hours of His life loving us all as He died on the cross.

And now, this God who has showered His love on us wants us to love. Jesus calls us, here, you and me, this church, to a life devoted to the kind of love that looks like encouragement and service and prayer.

When a church is made up of people who look alike, think alike and talk alike, a watching world doesn't find it remarkable that those people get along and that there is love.

But when there is diversity of thought and of culture and even of language in a church and there is still love, the world sits up and takes notice.

The excitement of the journey we are on here at Northwest is a journey of unity in Jesus in the midst of great diversity.

Beloved, let us love one another.