

## ***We're in this together!***

Rev. Michael J. Mattil

The minister was preoccupied with thoughts of how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money than they were expecting for repairs to the church building. He was annoyed to find that the regular organist was sick and a substitute had been brought in at the last minute. The substitute wanted to know what to play. "Here's a copy of the service," he said impatiently. "But, you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances. During the service, the minister paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected and we need \$4,000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more please stand up." At that moment, the substitute organist played "**The Star Spangled Banner.**" And that is how the substitute became the regular organist!

Today has been designated Gratitude Sunday in our Stewardship Emphasis. You received a packet as you arrived. Look at the **brochure** in that packet. There is a picture of a tree on the cover and it says "This is the day we go forward as a church family." The Bible passage on the cover says "*In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*" (Romans 12:5). I think they used a tree to remind us of all the different "branches" of Ministry. The **inside lists a few:** worship, education, outreach, fellowship and activities, new opportunities to serve. We should all be grateful that we have these things here at our congregation. Like the branches of a tree, we are church family. We are all in this together. Together we

- Make possible worship services and all the ministries of the church
- Provide for the maintenance and care of God's house
- Spread the good news of God's love and forgiveness.
- Teach the principles of love of Christ to our youth [Halloween Carnival]
- Share fellowship and inspiration to all who attend – at least we try.

All these things are different branches of the same tree that is our shared ministry in this place.

***"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17:7-8***

We are indeed blessed because we trust in the Lord. We have been led to faith in Jesus as our Savior.

One passage talks about us being the body. Another passage talks about a tree. I'm going to mix metaphors right now as I bring in yet another passage and talk about the tree that used to be right outside this window. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul again talks about the body of Christ and how we are all united and need to work together. He says there are many parts, but one body. And then he wrote these words.

***1 Corinthians 12:26-27 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.***

If one part suffers, the whole thing does – like the tree that used to block the sun from blazing through our stained glass window. **It was a beautiful tree**, full and tall. It looked great, but evidently there was some rot where one of the main branches came off the main trunk. The connection to the tree was weakened, and about a **third of that tree split off last Spring**. We left the rest of the tree in hopes that it would survive, and it appeared to be doing well. Or so we thought. On the Wednesday before last, about half of the tree that remained fell into the parking lot on a windy day. What was left standing was an ugly lopsided tree that was probably going to fall against the church and perhaps our window, **so we took it down**. As one part suffered, so did the whole thing, to the point where the entire tree was destroyed. It had to be cut down. It was painful, and we didn't want it to happen, but it did.

**How often does that happen** to us a body of believers here in this place? Some may think they are not as important as others, but if they are suffering, the whole body suffers. Sometimes parts of the body split off from us, and while we may appear to be doing okay, we have suffered as a result of the loss. Some will think it is not important for them to support our ministry with their time and efforts and offerings, and as a result, the whole body suffers.

The point is similar whether we are talking about a tree or a body or a congregation. When all the parts do their part, things work well. If some parts do not do their job or do not contribute, things don't go as well. So here is what you need to ask yourself: What is the part God is asking you to play in the ministry of this congregation – beyond financial support, which we are all called to give - how are you giving of yourself? **We are all in this together**, so to ask that thoroughly Lutheran and Catechetical question, “What Does This Mean?”

Lily Tomlin once said “We are all in this together, by ourselves.” While you may not say that, do your behavior and actions prove that to be true? That should not be the case. In this congregation, we are united by our common faith in Jesus Christ. We are all in this together.

- **We are not all the same**, but there are some things about us that are the same.
- We are not all the same, but **Jesus died** to pay for the sins of each and everyone of us.
- We are not all the same, but we have all been **called by the Holy Spirit** to believe in Jesus as our Savior.
- We are not all the same, but we have been **brought together** into this congregation to rejoice in the salvation that we have and share it with those who have not yet believed.
- We are not all the same, but we are united around **God’s Word and Sacraments**. We have a common Savior and therefore a common future: the certainty of life everlasting for Jesus’ sake.
- We are not all the same, but we are all **stewards** of what God has entrusted to our care and we need to be sure we are using His resources in a way that will be pleasing to Him.

The question is not “Will I be God’s Steward?” You are. The question you need to ask yourself is “What kind of steward will I be?”

***1 Corinthians 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.***

You are all stewards. You are all part of the body of Christ. You are all part of this congregation. You all need to continue to grow and mature as whatever part of the **tree** you may be, whatever branch of our ministry you are. Stewards who are growing and maturing will do the right things for the right reasons and strive for excellence in everything they do. This means, among other things, that God’s stewards give freely and generously of their time, talents and financial resources for the welfare of the body and for sharing the good news of Jesus with as many people as we can reach!

As you consider your financial pledge, whether you turn it in today or next Sunday, **this is the day** for us to resolve to move forward as a congregation who is determined to do God’s Will, to live up to our Mission Statement of strengthening our members in their relationship with Jesus Christ and empowering you to share Jesus with others. We are all in this together.