

“What Binds Us? – Created in God’s Image”
Sermon Series, 1 of 3
By Rev. James C. Ramsey

Texts: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Colossians 3:12-17

Preached: 9/30/18

This morning I begin a 3-part sermon series exploring the question “What Binds Us?” The trinity of sermons will be loosely organized around the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each sermon will explore how we are connected...bound together as God’s people here at East Union. We’ll also entertain ways we are held back, bound and kept from realizing our full potential.

We are surely bound together – what we do affects those around us, whether we realize it or not...whether we intend it or not!

This is the story of one man, whose behavior brought the New York City rush hour to a standstill. Thousands of New York commuters were stranded after a man’s arm became wedged down a subway train toilet as he tried to retrieve his mobile phone. Rescue crews had to dismantle the toilet with Edwin Gallart’s arm still stuck in the u-bend.

He had dropped his phone down the toilet shortly after the train left Grand Central Station.

Metro-North spokesman, Dan Brucker, said, “The man dropped his phone while in the lavatory. That was enough of a problem, but then under some completely misguided notion he stuck his hand into the toilet to extricate the phone. Then he went and forced his arm all the way down. He didn’t get the phone out and he didn’t get his arm out either,” he said.

Crew members unsuccessfully struggled to free the man before fire fighters and police were called. They dismantled the toilet using blowtorches. Thousands of dollars were spent in putting on extra trains and crews for stranded commuters during the incident.

“When his cell phone went down the toilet,” Mr. Brucker commented, “so did our evening rush hour, so did thousands of dollars of taxpayers’ money, and so did our ‘on time’ performance. Everything went down the toilet with

that phone.”

When asked, Mr. Brucker added that the rail company was “not particularly interested” in going through the toilet’s waste tank to retrieve the lost phone.

What a nightmare! But what we all do affects others all the time. Even our smallest gestures impact other people.

But we live in an increasingly polarized society. Seems like you are on one side or the other. Either you believe Brett Kavanaugh or Christine Blasey Ford. You’re either a Republican or a Democrat. You think President Trump is doing a great job or definitely not. You support the right to bear arms or you want gun control. You prefer to worship in the Community Center or the Sanctuary. You like contemporary praise songs or traditional hymns. You have to choose...one side or another...black or white...male or female.

What are we teaching our children? Will we teach them to choose? One side or another?

We’re bound together, not by our politics, not by our stance on any particular issue, not by our preferred way of worship, but by being children of God – each and every one of us is created in the image of God.

So, Moses could say to us what he said so many generations ago, “Hear...The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.

We are different, but we come from the same place – we share the same LORD.

A word about differences from one of my favorite voices, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. He said this in addressing the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland almost twenty years ago.

We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity. There is not just one planet or one star;

there are galaxies of all different sorts, a plethora of animal species, different kinds of plants and different races and ethnic groups. We are constantly being made aware of the glorious diversity that is written into the structure of the universe we inhabit, and we are helped to see that if it were otherwise, things would go awry. How could you have a soccer team if all were goalkeepers? How would it be an orchestra if all were French horns?

For Christians, who believe they are created in the image of God, it is the Godhead, diversity in unity and the three-in-oneness of God, which we and all creation reflect. It is this imago Dei too that invests each single one of us -- whatever our race, gender, education and social or economic status -- with infinite worth, making us precious in God's sight. That worth is intrinsic to who we are, not dependent on anything external, extrinsic. Thus there can be no superior or inferior race.

We are all of equal worth, born equal in dignity and born free, and for this reason deserving of respect whatever our external circumstances. We are created freely for freedom We belong in a world whose very structure, whose essence, is diversity, almost bewildering in extent. It is to live in a fool's paradise to ignore this basic fact.

Tutu's words ring true for me...We're different, you and I, but we have been called together, here on this hill, to worship and serve the Living God, our creator. That's a pretty special thing. We're a unique gathering of God's people here at East Union. I hope we don't take that for granted. I hope we relish our diversity and celebrate our unique calling in this place.

How we treat each other matters – because we are all God's chosen ones. What we wear matters – according to the Letter to the Colossians. It was written to a church in jeopardy, a church that had apparently lost track of what's vital...what bound them together.

What did you put on this morning? You chose your outfit, which shirt or blouse would work today. We also choose how we will be. How we will interact, what will govern our chance meetings and planned get-togethers. As God's chosen ones we are encouraged to wear compassion...kindness...humility...meekness...and patience.

Compassion is a word associated with Jesus in scripture. Just last week my Sunday School class was reading the story where Jesus comes upon

two blind men – the text says Jesus was “moved with compassion” and he touched their eyes and they regained their sight. Jesus often had compassion on the crowds. This week my Sunday School reads a text where Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Kindness looks good on everybody!

I heard a new definition of humility just recently...humility is being able to say, “I might be wrong.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Patience with each other goes a long way...so does forgiveness.

But all these things amount to undergarments, when compared with love.

Love is the most important outer layer – it is the team jersey...the school colors...should amount to a favorite sweater...warm, cozy, goes with anything and everything, can be worn for work or play, at the office or out-on-the-town! Love binds the whole wardrobe together. In fact, love binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love binds us together...God’s love, here at East Union. We were created in love and for love and it connects us – to the future God is planning for us and with us. I’m glad to be a part of it – I’m glad you’re a part of it.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.