

# Collaborate or Perish

John 15:9-17

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First Central Congregational UCC

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Today our annual Super Sale continues down in the gym and the Thrift Shop. A wide array of plants, books, art, clothes, and more is on sale. This is a big event that takes lots of people working together to pull off. We should express our thanks to the key organizers, which include Cherie Ferber, Barb Switzer, Laura Mitchell, Mildred Smock, Gary McConnell, and Sam Pfeiffer.

The Super Sale originated in our women's social group EVES. The EVES had an annual plant exchange, sharing with each other from the bounty of their gardens. Eventually other church members asked if they could participate as well. According to Peg Peterson, one year the group tried selling some of the extra plants, and surprisingly made a couple hundred dollars. The next year, instead of the plant exchange, they organized a plant sale and made \$600. The next year the Super Sale was born.

And it has grown every year. Plants, books, art, crafts, and thrift store items all go on sale together for one weekend every May. The youth usually provide a car wash, and the Women's Fellowship will sell sandwiches. It is quite the to-do!

According to Peg, "The best thing about the sale is the way it pulls together so many different people from the congregation in new ways. And we all have gardens made out of each other's favorite plants."

Today's gospel continues the images from last week. We are invited to abide, to be like the vine, drawing our energy from God and bearing much fruit. In today's passage Jesus expands the metaphor. He talks about love, joy, and friendship. Jesus asks us to love one another, in the same way that he has abided in the love of God. He tells us that our joy will be complete when we are filled with his joy. And Jesus calls us his friends. We are not servants of God, but friends of God and friends with one another. All these are images of unity.

It is Mother's Day, so it would be fitting for us to remember experiences of love and joy with those who have mothered us. Mothers are often the glue that binds everything together, keeping the unity of the family or a group of friends. My Grandma Nixon, Mammoo we call her, was that glue for our family, and things were never quite the same after she died. My mother instilled in me a love of learning and a delight in the beauty of the world. Grandma Jones gave me many gifts over the years. The most special was a quilt that continues to remind me of her loving care. She, who had never attended college, wanted to make sure my sister and I did, so her estate provided the funds for our educations. That Ph. D. at the end of my name could have a little asterisk – "Paid for by Christine Jones."

I have been blessed with other mothers. Ruth Robinson, my kindergarten Sunday school teacher, highly influenced my faith formation. Kay Boman, a high school teacher,

expanded my horizons. Christine Reynolds was my adopted grandmother during college, and we became such good friends, helping each other out. I'd drive her to and from the airport, and she'd cook me a meal every now and then. And there have been others.

I invite you to remember those special mothers in your life. And remember them as a reflection of the love, joy, and fellowship of God.

Today's gospel reminds us that love is a "transforming power" drawn from a divine source. The friendship and fellowship God desires for us is the same that God experiences. This is the beauty of the doctrine of the Trinity. Sure, there are lots of complicated aspects of the Trinity that hold no interest for me, but I delight in the Christian teaching that the essential nature of divinity is a relationship. And that, to me, is our core teaching about God. God is relationship. God is love.

Religion professor David S. Cunningham, writes in his commentary on this passage:

The love among the persons of the Trinity helps us to understand what wondrous love this truly is: concerned about others; not possessive or subordinating, thus allowing genuine space for the other to be; and superabundant, such that it can be offered without reserve.

The divine fellowship is ecstatic and abundant and overflows filling each and every one of us. It empowers us to love as God loves. To embrace one another -- family, friend and stranger -- in relationships of mutual respect and care. This is God's dream for the world, that we might all be friends.

And it has become imperative that humanity embrace this gospel message. In her book *Reality is Broken*, video game designer Jane McGonigal writes:

"Collaborate or perish" is perhaps the single most urgent rallying cry for our times. The ability to collaborate at extreme scales isn't just a competitive advantage in business or in life anymore. Increasingly, it's a survival imperative for the human race.

She continues:

Surviving the twenty-first century together will require us to adopt longer horizons of thinking, acting, and collaborating.

Now, McGonigal herself thinks that the tools we can use to fix our broken reality have been discovered in the world of video games. I am drawn to her work because of the similarities with faith and spirituality. And in this particular instance, the lessons on collaboration coincide powerfully with the gospel teaching about unity and friendship that arises from the love of God.

Collaboration has three aspects. First is cooperating. Collaborators begin by "acting purposefully toward a common goal." Next is coordinating -- "synchronizing efforts and sharing resources." And finally is cocreating, which she defines as "producing a novel outcome

together.”

Think about how you play a game for a moment. Start with something simple like freeze tag. Someone is It and they run around trying to tag other people. When those people are tagged they are supposed to stay frozen until someone else unfreezes them. The game can be a whole lot of fun, but only if everyone cooperates with the rules. If someone keeps running after they’ve been tagged, then they spoil the game.

Games work because we all agree to play together and abide by the same rules or practices, and these usually make an object more difficult. Take football for instance. You could go out onto a football field and pick up a ball and run down the length of the field and across the line into the endzone. Maybe you’d enjoy the running, but there wouldn’t be a lot of joy in that experience by itself. The joy of scoring a touchdown in a game comes from the difficulty. There are 11 people trying to stop you. There are rules that make it more complicated than just picking up a ball and running with it. All the complexity and the difficulty is what makes it fun, and all the complexity and the difficulty comes from everyone cooperating to follow the rules.

Which is why cheaters and spoilsports ruin games, not because they win, but because they’ve failed to understand the very point of the game, which is cooperating to make it more difficult so we can have a joyful experience that we otherwise couldn’t have on our own.

McGonigal describes collaboration as a “superpower.” Superpowers, in this sense, are the things impossible to do alone. By working together we actually change what is possible.

When we collaborate in playing games, we establish a common ground, concentrate on the same goals, foster mutual regard, and honor collective commitment. Game players work to make good games happen. As a Sooner fan, I can thank you Cornhuskers for many years of doing your best to make sure we played a good, difficult game.

When good games happen, our joy is complete!

And so it is true for the other things in our life. When we collaborate together with others – in a family, at work, in our neighborhoods, at church – we can accomplish things that we could not do on our own. When it works, our joy is complete.

According to the Gospel of John, this is what God desires for us. God wants us to be friends. To have the same loving fellowship that God does. An empowering love which is abundant and overflows. A love that embraces one another in relationships of mutual respect and care.

“This is my commandment,” Jesus says, “that you love one another as I have loved you.” May it be so.