

**One-Anothering**  
**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Mary Koon**  
**June 13, 2021**

This morning we will continue in our sermon series on the church and its meaning and purpose in our world. This has been a wonderful way for Pastor Bart to share some foundational theology with us.

As you recall, we began by affirming the Spiritual giftedness of all people, everyone has something to contribute to the common good, to honor God. We thought about how God's spirit has brought us together, a visible manifestation of God's redemptive work. Last week we talked about the church being God's mission in the world. Loving God, self, and others is our purpose and call.

Today we'll look at how is it that we are to be in community.

The scripture this morning comes from the Paul's letter to the Colossians. When Paul was in prison, he received the report that cultural pressures were tempting this young church to turn from the ways of Jesus. Discord and conflict were breaking out within the ranks as they put other Gods or priorities before Jesus and were judging each other. Paul writes to encourage the community, to remind them who they are and to start taking seriously how they acted amongst themselves. Because then, as it is still today, the church is called to show the world what God's realm can be.

This little piece of the epistle is jammed full of metaphor and message. Hear now how God may be speaking to you through the scripture this morning.

## **Colossians 3:12–17**

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### **Prayer**

Jean Paul Sartre once said, “Humanity I love, it’s my neighbor I can’t stand.” <https://www.brudershof.com/en/voices-blog/justice/mankind-is-not-my-neighbor>

Today I want to talk about one-anothering; yes it’s a made-up verb, yet the best way to consider just how we are to represent Christ to the world. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love, not in the abstract, but specifically. To love those around us.

The term “one-another” or in Greek, a-lay-loan is used 100 times in 94 verses in the New Testament. 47 of those verses give instructions to followers of Jesus, and more than half of them come from Paul. One third deal with the church getting along (be kind, forgive, bear with), 1/3 are about loving one another, a few stress humility, and the rest talk about telling the truth, and offering hospitality, praying and encouragement. (<https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/>)

There's a very cool infographic that we can put in the announcements next week, these verses would make a neat Bible study!

One-anothering is so important that we see it all over Jesus final evening with his disciples. After humbling himself to wash their feet, he instructs them to do the same, and one of the final things he says to them is, "this is my new command, that you love one another." One-anothering is how we reflect the nature of Christ, the one we represent.

And it is as counter cultural today as it was in ancient times.

We live in a world that does its best to "other" people, fostering the lie that some folks are more worthy than others or somehow do not bear the image of God. These falsehoods create animosity between people who look, think, act or love differently. The "other", then, becomes someone who becomes scary and threatening to our stuff or way of life.

New life in Christ is to be a lived reality, where community comes together in unity of purpose that values, respects and reflects the diversity, beauty and worth of all human beings and our earth. That means that as a body, we practice one-anothering, as a way to counter othering.

The writer to the Colossians tells us to shape our lives around one-anothering by clothing ourselves entirely in Christ.

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience become the garments we wear, woven with joy and perseverance after a lot of practice. We wrap it all in love, almost like a big belt, which binds everything together in harmony.

Getting dressed is an intimate act, so the idea of clothing oneself with Christ points to the close relationship between Christ and the church. Putting Christ on the outside reminds us of the work that happens on the inside. It allows for transformation from the outside in!

This metaphor may have been a convenient one for Paul to share with the Colossians, since Colossae was known for making very fine wool. Have you ever had the experience of wearing something on the outside that actually shifted the way you felt on the inside? You may stand a little straighter or be on your best behavior when you are wearing your finest clothing.

Or when you wrap a wool scarf around your neck on a cold day, soon you will grow warmer on the inside.

In the same way, as those called into one body, when we practice listening with compassion and acting with kindness...as we take deep breaths in order to be patient with one another, when we forgive one another for being human and making mistakes, the actions invite a change deep within our souls. And our insides begin to match the outside.

In no way am I suggesting that we be inauthentic, or put on a happy face to look good to the world. "Getting along" isn't the goal. Superficial relationships damage the body of Christ. In fact, this is how churches have gotten the reputation of being hypocritical and is why distrust of the institutional church is high in some populations.

Church is a covenant community. We make promises to God and one another to pray and give, to serve and grow together.

Let's be real. Doing life with living, breathing fallible humans is messy. Talking through our conflicts, staying at the table and not walking away has potential deepen our relationships with others.

Just last week I heard the story about the struggles Oak Grove went through to become a More Light church. The hours of conversation, the heightened tempers, not-infrequent tears, and heated discussions that went along with discerning the call of the church to fully love and

include our LGBTQAI siblings. Some people left the church, but most did not, thanks be to God.

As we practice love, we will make mistakes. Growing and learning means that we will mess up and stand in need of forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't about forgetting, or not allowing consequences, but about the restoration of relationship. Forgiveness can only be expected when those who have done wrong take responsibility and make amends. And this requires humility, it takes work and patience.

Oak Grove, our presbytery and the entire PCUSA, is currently discussing restorative actions in the form of financial restitution and public witness and apology for the harm that we have done to our siblings of color and indigenous siblings. As a body, we stand in need of confession and forgiveness. This is an ongoing conversation that is taking place in courageous spaces. It's uncomfortable and personally stretches me. It's one I'm glad we're having.

Throughout every age, as the Holy Spirit leads us to deeper understandings of what it means to be the church and widen our circle of concern, we will wrestle with who we are and how we are to live.

And so, we practice. Practicing a pattern of authentic life, of "one-anothering" together grows our muscle memory. We know that even the most skilled musicians, athletes, artists and speakers need practice.

As I thought about the metaphor of wearing Christ in a broader sense, I thought about how we dress our church building as a sign to everyone on Old Shakopee Road as a visible reminder of God's realm. We know that the church is not the building, the church is a people, but on this corner, we have the unique opportunity to bear witness to God.

And thus, we have dressed ourselves with the Rainbow and trans pride flags, the peace pole. We place messages of love and hope on our

electronic sign. Our commitment to the gospel is further represented by our BLM signs, solar panels, rain gardens, empty cross, and now columbarium.

All of these outer garments – the flags, signs and symbols – mean nothing if someone steps into the church and doesn't find the same welcome and inclusion lived out on the inside. They ring hollow if we are not always striving to have our actions match our words.

I truly believe that our public dressing has encouraged more conversation among our members, and people in the community. It has brought about bolder and empowered proclamation and witnessing.

Finally, worship is at the heart of one-anothering.

As followers of Jesus, worship is the core of our life together and is actually practice for life outside the sanctuary. I love to think of it like a spiral flower. It is here, even virtually, that we build our spiritual muscles singing God's praise, confessing sin, asking for forgiveness, praying for others, reading scripture, giving thanks, sharing the table, pledging to help raise a child in faith. We practice here and then practice in the world, we return each week for more practice and to reconnect and then spiral out again. Over and over growing our circle wider.

One-anothering has been our primary consideration throughout the pandemic and continues to inform our decisions moving forward. For love of neighbor, and care for the least of these, we continue to hold online worship. In a couple of weeks we will gather outside to worship in person, and we will pay close attention to how we can sing, and when we can return to some important worship elements like passing the peace, and sharing one loaf and cup in communion.

With thanksgiving, let us celebrate the beautiful and challenging call to one-another in a world that is determined to "other." To stay at the table

when we disagree, when it would be easier to walk away. To forgive, encourage, and treat one another with kindness, knowing that Christ is in the midst of it all.

AMEN.