

## **Roots and Wings**

### **5) Celebrating Together**

**Rev. Luke Ham**

**November 6, 2016**

It is good to be with you all today.

I want to let you know that because we have so many things happening in worship today, my sermon is a little shorter than usual (this is where I expected you to all say awwwww....).

But seriously, even though this message is a little shorter, I want to assure you that the topic we will be discussing is no less important.

Over the past 4 weeks, Ron and I have been thinking about the Roots and Wings that our giving allows the church to develop.

We have thought about the positive work that we have accomplished and the work we have still to do.

We have talked about not only the churches need to receive our gifts, but our fundamental need to share what we have in order to better appreciate our blessings as well as allow or an impact that goes beyond our own lives.

Ron last week had us think about what it would look like if we started to get excited about “Life Styles of the Extravagantly Generous”

And this morning...we come with one simple purpose....to celebrate all God is doing and celebrate all the work that God’s people have done and are continuing to do as we move forward together.

I want to start out this morning with a confession.... I suffer from what many refer to as FOMO.

For those not familiar with the word.....FOMO is also known as “Fear of Missing Out.”

I have been struggling with FOMO since I was a young child. One of my grandparents favorite stories that they love to remind me of is when they once were hosting the annual company picnic at their house in Michigan.

And this wasn't some small get together....there were people everywhere.... They were spread throughout the living room, the backyard, the outdoor deck, and some were even playing Ping Pong in the garage. There were probably 100 or more people there and to my 4-year old eyes it felt like 1,000.

After appetizers and drinks it came time for every to find their seats at the tables set up in back yard....

well everyone except 4-year old Luke. My parents and grandparents thought it would be best if I had my meal in the kitchen.

And as the legend goes, the scene I made at that moment drew all 100 people spread across my grandparent's house and yard to stop their conversations....pause their ping pong games and stare as I yelled at the top of my lungs "BUT I WANT TO BE WITH THE PEOPLE!!!!"

There is something about being at the table that is important.

There is something about not just being on the outskirts of the party that children and perhaps a few adults long for.

However, sometimes that drive we have as children to explore....to be in the midst of what is happening with other people fades a little bit.

Many of us become content staying in our little corners of the world....to stay home with a good book....and that is fine...those can be healthy practices...Jesus himself withdrew when he felt drained that comes with constantly being surrounded by others.

But....it is important to note that Jesus always went back...Jesus continually engaged with people and taught his disciples to do the same.

That is what being part of God's Kingdom is about...it is being engaged with others...in genuine and loving relationship with those who are similar to us...and those who are different than us.

Christianity is kind of unique in that way.

While there are other religions that are focused more on the inward...and enlightenment that comes getting in the right frame of mind internally.

And there are other religions that value community...but with those of who are of the same background, tradition and culture as they are.

Christianity in its purest form rejects this notion of being an isolated community. We are called to offer the community to outsiders...it is what many would argue is the main strategic mission of being a Christian.

Now, while we as progressive Christians work hard to respect those who have different religious traditions as we do...and try not to impose our own view, we still strive to share about and cherish our differences... we still are an open group for those who choose to join us.

We still welcome all who want to find out what Christ means when he promises Life to the fullest for us.

We still hope that the way we live invites others who are looking for a loving and God-Centered community to join us.

We strive to have the courage to extend an invitation to others to see what we are about...

Our motto for the United Methodist church even speaks to this.... Open Hearts, Open Doors and Open Minds.

Celebrating with others is what this is....this right here...us gathered this morning is all about.

Following the three simple rules of our Faith. Do No Harm, Do Good and Stay in love with God is not just a personal statement...but it is the goal of our community...a goal we should be doing together.

But being part of the community is not always easy is it?

Often times we hear our friends and neighbors say that they don't need church...they can read their Bible on their own...they can do a devotion online....they can pray when they are on their morning Jog on the Iron Horse trail or while doing Yoga on their back deck in the morning.

And it's hard to blame them...being part of a community of faith...especially as diverse in thought and background and experience as ours can be messy.

We vote differently.

Many of us were raised in vastly different settings from Rural Alabama to downtown Chicago to Australia or Europe, Asia or the Middle East.

But...I believe...when we give it a chance...we discover that our differences make us stronger and make give proof to the world that the Holy Spirit is working among us.

This is a very special Sunday...one where we are celebrating 3 elements of community together....

First, Today is All Saints Sunday...a time where we mourn the Saints who we have lost to death...but at the same time we also celebrate the lasting impact they have on our lives and on the life of the church and we celebrate the promise of Jesus... that life doesn't end at our earthy death.

Secondly, today we celebrate consecration Sunday. A day where many of us will be putting forth our pledges for the next year. And asking God to consecrate...to set aside and make Holy the gifts we offer for the work of the church.

And last but not least, we are partaking the Lord's Supper together...celebrating the new covenant Jesus has made for the world at a table that is open to all who want to take part.

Indeed we have so much to celebrate together.

In the parable that we heard this morning, Jesus acknowledges that God invites us all to the banquet....we are all invited to the party. It is up to us to choose whether or not we respond to the invitation.

It also points out the fact that those folks who seem to have what the world considers Success so often miss out on the banquet...because they fall into the trap of putting other priorities over the celebration God wants them to partake in.

I have a big business deal that is about to go through...I can't make it to the celebration this week...

I bought a new set of Oxen...or maybe in our language...I just bought a new car that I just have to take out for a spin on such a beautiful morning like this...so I can't make it to church this week...

I've just gotten married...I'm going to be busy with the honeymoon and the moving into a new house...and then furniture shopping the next few weekends and then yard work.... so I'll try to come back to church next month...

These are excuses we hear in our parable. `

It is so impressive to me how Jesus' Parables shared nearly 2,000 years ago still speak so clearly to our lives today.

It is easy to find reasons not to come to church and celebrate isn't it?

But when we begin to forget to celebrate in community together, something to the core of who we are as humans begins to fade away. Part of our humanity goes away.

Because believe we are made for...we are wired to celebrate in community together...from the beginning of our sacred text it says “It is not good for man to be alone...”

And this is a message that is more important than ever as various studies and surveys are finding even with all of our advances in social media people are feeling more isolated and lonely than ever before....

(Pause)

This week we witnessed some baseball history...as the Chicago Cubs won their first world series since 1908.

And even though I was rooting for Cleveland I couldn't help but watch in awe as I heard thousands of Chicago fans join together as they sung “*Go Cubs Go. Go cubs Go, Hey Chicago what do you say, the cubs are going to win today.*” Man that song is catchy....

It is so impressive to see the power...the magic of a fan base like that when they are rooting for their team...but we can forget that is what it can be like for us in the church,

When we gather around our cause...the cause Jesus taught us to be about...

Visiting the Sick, Feeding the Hungry, and being with those on the margins of society...giving shelter and clothes to those left out in the cold.

We gather and we celebrate the faith we have in the eternal life that Jesus promises us....and gives us hope as we remember our loved ones... the saints of our lives and our church.

In our second scripture passage attributed to the Apostle Paul, we find these very important instructions:

*“As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be proud, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on*

*God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”*

The line that jumps out at me the most in this reading is “(the) God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”

So many times we get caught up in *what we are missing* instead of the realization of *all that we have*.

I’m always fascinated to talk to folks who have been married for 40 or more years and hear about the various aspects of that is like to be in a committed relationship for so long.

And as we go over what the highlights and been and where the struggles lie, I often hear that some of the happiest moments...some of the times they remember most fondly were when they were first starting out...and lived in a small house or apartment...and had basically nothing to their name...very little money...very few possessions...yet without all those distractions they were able to cherish one another so much more.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why we are instructed to not get caught up in our riches...in our stuff...because while we have been told by advertising that it is in these possessions we find joy and fulfillment, these are the very distractions that make us miss out on the party....the party that is found in building relationships with one another...and with God.

At this point, some of you may be thinking “*wait a minute...didn’t he promise us a short sermon?!?!*”

So, Let me wrap things up with this:

I want to let you all know that I am so thankful that we are striving to be part of God’s Dinner Banquet together...

I want to thank those of you who through your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness give so much to this community of faith.

And it is my prayer that we can follow the examples of the saints...those parents, grandparents, those mentors in our lives who showed us that people are more important than possessions....that justice is more important than self-gain.....that God's priorities should take precedence over our own busy-ness...

And I pray that we can continue to gather each week....and Celebrate Together!

Amen.