

“Together”

John 13:35 & 15:1-27, Colossians 3:14, 1 Peter 3:8,
Matthew 16:25, & Romans 7:19

Pastor James York

October 5, 2014

Paul Tillich defines sin as separation. There is separation between humans and God, separation between humans and each other, and separation within our selves. It is the state of being separated that produces sinful acts. The good news is God overcomes separation. Where sin, separation, increases grace abounds all the more. No matter how great the chasm of separation, God builds an even greater bridge achieving togetherness. Grace is reunion, overcoming the distance, acceptance, and reconciliation.

Last week we explored relationality: how we are all connected; how whenever one makes a choice all are affected. Strive to be well-educated, fit, financially-secure and successful – to lovingly serve, building up humanity instead of doing these things to be self-sufficient adding to separation. If you do not understand a group, lifestyle, or political position, love them by listening to them and become friends with them. You do not need to agree with them. A loving debate is often good for all involved. When one avoids those they disagree with, the sin of separation is deepened. One may then lose perspective that those you disagree with are doing what they believe is best. One may then become afraid of them or afraid of the change they may create. One may then begin to think bad thoughts about the group. One may then hate. So goes the downward spiral of sinful separation.

Love is the solution to all separation. Tillich believes separation is the root cause of sin. One who feels separated from God is likely to worship other Gods, idols, misuse God’s name, and ignore the Sabbath. Separation in families can lead to betrayal and lack of honor for one another. Separation between one another can lead to lies, theft, jealousy, and even murder. The feeling of separation, of not feeling loved, or not feeling good enough can lead to depression even if in reality the person is loved and excelling in life. Separation in self by conflicting thoughts, actions, guilt, and frustration leads to all sorts of hurtful behavior. Separation between political parties leads to gridlock. Separation between groups of people leads to war. Separation is overcome by love creating togetherness. All the commandments and law can be fulfilled by love. Jesus said, **John 13:35 NLT Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.** Peter said. **1 Peter 3:8 NLT “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”**

The Apostle Paul said. **Colossians 3:14 NLT “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”** Imagine your life with all your relationships in perfect harmony. Imagine life with all relationships, families, organizations, and countries loving in perfect harmony.

The story is told of a man who dreamed of a room full of people. In the middle of the room was a large pot of delicious stew. The people in the room were malnourished, arguing, and

sick. Each person had a very long spoon strapped to their arm. They would fill their spoon with stew, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The man looked at the misery and thought this room of sick, separated people is like hell. Then he dreamed of another room which was exactly like the first one except the people were healthy and fit. They were laughing, talking, and enjoying one another's company. They had the same long handled spoons, but they worked together and fed one another. The man thought this loving togetherness is like heaven.

We are called and commissioned by God to minister to each other and the world. Ministers receive God's love and share love. Ministers love the cosmos into perfect harmony. Ministers enable others to love. All of us are ministers. You are the first ones listed in our bulletin, in our newsletter, and in the church entrance.

God's grace enables us to transform, to minister, to bring together the separation in ourselves, with one another and God. The transformative power of togetherness starts when we give ourselves to God in worship. Worship is daily choosing the most loving way. Often the most loving way requires us to let something go. True worship is giving everything and all we are in gratitude to God. This is a great paradox of faith when we give our all to love, we receive even more love. When we let go of selfishness, we receive more abundant blessings for our self. When we let go of control, fear, and hate we experience the harmony of togetherness. Jesus said it this way, **Matthew 16:25 "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."**

Connecting with God and achieving togetherness is a journey, an ongoing process. How is your connection with God? Are you letting go so your heart, mind, and arms open to receive from God the source of all life and love? One way to gauge your spiritual health is to notice the amount of Spiritual fruit in your life. How much peace, hope, love, joy, grace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are you enjoying?

The apostle Paul lamented, **Romans 7:19 "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."** We often struggle with an inner separation. Our self divided against itself. Most of us know we are loved and cherished by God but we still judge ourselves and compare ourselves to others. Most of us know the right thing to do, but we often have a tough time doing it. Always remember God loves you now, no matter what you have done or how imperfect you may feel, God loves you.

Togetherness in the inner self means loving yourself. Togetherness with God will transform you and give you a healthy self-esteem neither thinking too little or too highly of ourselves. Our self-worth comes from God. Without God we are not capable of very much by eternal standards; yet, with God we can do amazing miraculous things. God has given you special gifts. God has given you at least one gift that no one else has and the world needs. God made you unique and different. Discover, nurture, and celebrate your uniqueness. God created a world of great variety. Be yourself and resist the temptation to be like someone else. Spend more energy striving to be authentic, to be real with God, yourself, and others than striving to be perfect.

Share your unique gifts and perspective and lovingly receive all other gifts and perspectives bringing all together. As we allow God to create togetherness with God and togetherness within ourselves we are transformed more and more to let God create togetherness with one another. God created us to be together. Scripture tells us that all gifts and each person are of equal and profound importance. Every person is a priceless treasured child of God. The most abrasive person in your life is equal with you. They have a unique gift that you and the world need to live life to the fullest. Other countries, groups, and organizations have unique gifts that we need to live life to the fullest. Is this also true of other religions? Do all religions have a unique gift that will enhance our love for God, others, and ourselves? Togetherness is formed by God's grace flowing through us. Togetherness takes both sides loving together. Love your enemies; by human strength it is impossible, but with God's grace reunion is possible. Imagine if everyone opened themselves to God's transforming love bringing all people together. Imagine if all the resources we spend on war, weapons, security, and police could be used for housing, medicine, food, and education. It could happen one day. It starts with each of us doing something to stop separation and promote togetherness. Perhaps the togetherness needs to start in your own family or with your neighbor.

Like a jigsaw puzzle each of us has a unique shape, a unique gift, that our world needs to complete the picture. When we are separated from one another, the picture is incomplete and our life is missing some of the beauty, joy, and love God wants us to experience.

Jesus used a cluster of grapes as a metaphor for what our life together should become. **John 15:1-27 MSG "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. God cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing God prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who God is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples. "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in God's love. "I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father. "You didn't**

choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, God gives you. "But remember the root command: Love one another."

Love will overcome all obstacles. Love will unite us all together in harmony. Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday, the glory of love to unite all people together. Today we give to the peacemaking offering to promote love bringing all people together.

We are to love, be together, and rejoice like God the Father and God the Son love one another.

The glory of love to fill us with the joy of togetherness is seen in the love of a father and son, the Hoyt family. Rick, the son, sustained brain damage at birth leaving him unable to control his limbs. The doctors told Judy and Dick to put their son in an institution. It's the type of circumstances that often tears families apart, leading to separation. The Hoyts were determined to love, to stay together. Together they got Rick a special computer that Rick can use to communicate by moving the side of his head against a switch. Together they helped Rick get an education through a public school. One day a classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him. Rick typed out, Dad I want to do that. Dick was a self-described "porker" who never ran but he decided to run together with his son by pushing him the five miles in his wheel chair. After the event Rick typed, "Dad when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!" So from that point forward, together they run. Together they run every week and have run the Boston marathon 24 times. Together they rode a bicycle across the United States. Together they have competed in 212 triathlons. It is inspiring to see Dick swimming, towing his son in a dinghy, lifting him into the special bike, and pushing him in the wheel chair. Together their love fills each other with great joy. People have begged Dick to compete on his own. His answer is always, "No way, I do it purely for the awesome feeling I get seeing Rick's huge smile and delight as we run, swim, and ride together." At a recent doctor's check up the doctor told Dick that if he wasn't in such great shape from running, swimming, and riding together with his son, he probably would have died 15 years ago from heart disease. Together they have saved each other's life and discovered joys beyond their wildest imaginations. Togetherness is God's desire for all of us. Amen