

SUNDAY September 21, 2025 “Better Together”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Hebrews 10:24-25 Matthew 18:18-20

What a wonderful day to gather together and ask God's blessings upon us all! It is officially the first day of autumn but we may not realize it with the daytime warm temperatures we have been experiencing. It is also the International Day of Peace as declared in 1981 by the United Nations which recognizes September 21 as a day to focus on our world and what is occurring. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres states, "Around the world lives are being ripped apart, childhoods extinguished, and basic human dignity discarded, amidst the cruelty and degradations of war." So it is imperative and important for us all to reflect on the theme for 2025 -"Act Now for a Peaceful World". And why is this important for us to consider? If we do, we will all be better off together. That is, "better together!" This is also what we might like to see for the children to see- a world that is at peace.

It is a great day when God's people gather to worship and with the sacrament of Holy Baptism being shared we are renewed with faith and hope that God loves us and that we are one with each other made possible in Jesus Christ! No matter where you are on your faith journey, you matter and you belong. We all felt the waters of baptism and prayerfully you will remember this day as a special day in your life, because the water not only was refreshing but reminded you of renewal and beginning again.

Our world is having difficulties and so is our country, our city and many people. But when we walk through life together, with honesty and grace we begin to see God more clearly and feel His presence more deeply. The church is not perfect but it is meant to be a place where we experience God's love through community. Belonging is an important first step, and for little Ruby she now belongs to God's family because of the waters of baptism! She has a lot to learn about God, but in many ways we all do. We don't have everything figured out. But when we come together, we build real relationships, we discover and rediscover hope, healing and what Jesus offers as the gift of eternal life. As we grow and open our hearts to each other, we also open ourselves to the wonderful works that God wants to do in us and through us. This is also reason to be 'better together'.

And isn't life filled with good things that go together-- not just because they compliment each other- like salt and pepper as standing spices. There are things that just go better together- like experiencing a movie with popcorn, or eating cookies with a drink of milk, sitting by a campfire and making 's'mores' or being at the beach and watching the waves of water or a sunset. What each of these do in their existence is great but when put together they are

amazing combinations. Just think about some of your favourite moments- it often occurs because of those minutes shared with other people that make them even more special.

We read in Matthew 18 that when 2-3 gather in Jesus' name He is there. Jesus shows up! This is why we gather together as Glenwood UC because Jesus is here and the Spirit moves us to feel something good for us- we are strengthened and renewed and the desire to do something good for others results!

As we come back to church this fall season it is important to be reminded of how important it is for all of us to come together to worship in person and online! There is a story about a man who just stopped going to church. He didn't make a big deal about it but simply he found he liked to sleep in on Sundays, he wasn't involved in any of the groups or leadership anymore and so he just stayed home. One cool evening some church friends and the minister stopped in for a visit. They were in the room with the fireplace glowing and warm. After a few minutes the minister using the fire tongs slowly moved a piece of wood away from the glow of the fire. This piece of wood slowly dimmed and turned grey. Nothing was said. A few minutes later one of the church friends went up to the piece of wood, put it back in to where the fire was strong and bright. It began to glow bright and hot again. The man turned to his friends-- I'll see you on Sunday. Alone we isolate ourselves and we miss out on one of God's greatest gifts- each other. We need to be connected and it is God's Spirit that connects us so that when we carry concerns for ourselves or celebrate joyful moments-- we all grow in faith. As we walk together we have the opportunity to reflect God's love in powerful way and those looking in can see that Christ is in the midst of us. Yes we need each other just as God created us to be in Christ Jesus.

Our reading from Hebrews 10 gives to us a church faithful to Christ a reminder of what we are called to do. *Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as the Day approaches.* One might better interpret the word provoke as 'spur' one another, like a cowboy uses spurs on his boots not to harm the horse but to prompt it forward with energy and purpose. We need each other to challenge and inspire and to learn of one another. Take for example, a health issue that one is currently enduring. When they hear how another person handled a similar situation through faith, there is respect, love and caring that cannot be purchased at any price. This is why it is important to share the concerns we have with others- this is why we ask for God to strengthen us as well. And this is what has been missing in many of our churches today-- the need to come together again and again in order to be encouraged, strengthened and staying united in purpose.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in “Life Together” writes about his time leading a secret seminary during the time of Nazi Germany. It was a small, tight-knit community of young men training for ministry under extreme pressure and threat. Life was simple difficult, rich with spiritual depth. They shared meals, prayers scripture readings and confession. Bonhoeffer was asked why he insisted on maintaining such a close Christian community in dangerous times. His reply was that *‘the gift of being together in Christ was not something to be taken for granted- it was a divine blessing that many Christians throughout history had longed for and gone without.’* Bonhoeffer believed that being “physically present with other Christians is a source of uncomparable joy and strength to the believer.”

As Glenwood UC plans to share together in its 70th anniversary, we need to remember that we are committed to being here. We belong- this is your church family- and it is Ruby’s now too!. We don’t just visit the church- we invest in something bigger than ourselves which is filled with a movement of love, grace and truth.

We believe that we are better together and that includes you. It’s a family where we support one another through the ups and downs of life here on earth. We believe in Jesus God’s Son who came to redeem us and forgive us and give to us the gift of eternal life. We also believe in being one with each other in Christ through sharing in sacraments of communion and feeling the waters of baptism.

And we are bridging our time together- from before to today. We are past the pandemic by 5 years but we often still feel this way of not really wanting to connect with each other as we are just not sure. But we are here and the bridge that we have which ties us together is Jesus Christ. Through the Sprit we are able to grow in faith and in trusting one another. We are also to encourage each other as we share one with each other the joys and sorrows of every day living. And this includes praying for our world. It is also taking up the call to act now for a world of peace.

We worship God- Father, Son and Spirit and we are better together because Christ is here. Let us remember this as we pray:
 God of grace and love we praise and thank you that we are one with Christ, one with each other through your gift of life and hope. Help us O God to take up the call to act now for a world of peace. Enable us to be strengthened and encouraged to move forward in faith. Bless us O God we pray for we are one. Amen.