

"A Threefold Cord"

2.Oct.11

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
(World Communion Sunday)

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When there is a funeral, memorial, or graveside service, we do not do these alone. We stand up for one another. We mourn the loss of a friend or loved one *together*. When there is a worship celebration, we do not, in general, do it alone. We worship *together*. When there is a critical decision a church needs to make, the church does not do it alone. One person does not make that decision. The church family makes that decision *together*. When there is a wedding ceremony, a baptism, a confirmation, we also do not do these alone. We stand up for one another. We stand with one another. We participate and celebrate *together*

Whether I officiate at a wedding, a funeral, or a baptism, I always begin with words like this, "We are gathered here in the sight of God, and before each of you, family and friends..." We do these sorts of things *together!*

Our Scripture for today comes from an Old Testament book (Hebrew Scripture); one of the "Books of Wisdom". The last sentence in this passage is perhaps the most important--"...a three-fold cord is not easily broken..." This idea of a "3-fold cord" comes from the then very familiar cultural idea of spinning wool into yarn. One cord of twisted wool by itself is weak. When the weaver added another strand, the piece of yarn became stronger. Twist yet a third strand of wool with the other two strands and the resulting cord became much stronger and much more durable. Only with great difficulty and effort could it be broken, if at all. So, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes writes, "a three-fold cord is not quickly broken".

It is also sort of like that familiar "pencil game" with which many of us probably grew up.

Take 1...break one...easy.

Take 2...break two...pretty hard.

Take 3...break three...almost impossible.

There *is* strength in numbers, especially when God is among the numbers!

In the Hebrew language, the word *mitzvah* means "commandment". The sense of the "root" word for *mitzvah* conveys "to connect together". Interesting, that God may have even given us the "commandments" so we could "better connect ourselves" with each other. You see, Scripture, God, and faith are all about doing things together. Indeed, *covenant* itself implies togetherness and relationship.

From January to July of this year all of you, *together*, made it possible for this church to do outreach ministries to those less fortunate than we...either through Disciples Women's mission undertakings, or the Food Pantry, or the Neighborhood organization called "Dream Catchers", or through budgeted funds. And how much have you done together in these past six months? \$26,000 worth of outreach (mostly with non-budgeted funds). None of us, alone, could have done that. But together, we *can* and we *did*.

In August, all of us again came together to help the school children at Lamar Elementary to the tune of \$750.00 for school supplies. And then some of our church members went over and helped collate the supplies into backpacks. Each Lamar student received one backpack full of school supplies. Again, we did this *together*, not separately. Plus, we did it together with five other churches!

"...a 3-fold cord is not easily broken..."

Just last month, all of us, *again together*, gave \$500.00 to the work of Teen Challenge with their disadvantaged clients. We did *not* do this separately. All of your combined offerings made this possible.

And this evening, at our Annual Beans 'n' Jeans event we will once again, *together*, celebrate the Lord, His church, and give of ourselves for the future ministry of our Food Pantry.

I could go on! You see, we do things like this *together*. Christ's Church does things like this *together*, and any gifts we give to Memorial and to Christ's people the more you and I take part in God's work and Kingdom. It is also important for us to realize that our gifts to Memorial and beyond are more to honor God than to celebrate Memorial itself.

Jesus did not choose only one disciple. He chose a "group". And why? Probably so they could and would do *together* the things the Lord would ask of them. Even when He decided to send someone ahead of Him, saying, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few..." (*Lk 10:1*), He sent 70 followers out. Not just 1, but 70 and He sent them not individually, so they could do His work *together*.

In the Book of Acts, Chapter 2 we read, "All who believed *were together* and had all things in common..." (*2:44*). And again, later, in the Book of Acts we read that at one point the twelve disciples "called together the whole community of the followers..." (*from 6:1*).

a "cord of many threads" bound together

Even St. Paul realized the importance of Christians being "bound together" to serve. (See *Col. 2:16 ff*) At one point he wrote that the whole body of believers are nourished and *held together* to one another by God Himself. He does not write that each individual, all unto him or her self, is nourished by God. Though this is true, Paul indicates it is even more

important that all believers...all the individual strands...are bound together in one strong cord not easily broken.

So in this time of the year we *come together* as individual strands tightly woven together to make our commitments to one another, to Christ, and to those He wishes us to serve for next year.

Together, we are stronger than we are separately.

Together, we are much harder to break.

What the writer of Ecclesiastes said is true,

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor... For if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity the one who falls, who has no one to help them up... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."
(*Eccl. 4:9-10, New International Bible version*)

Together we are more than helpful to each other, whether it be in aspects of our ministries, or in prayer and pastoral care concerns, or in financial and programming matters, or in our spiritual matters.

Next Sunday we will bring our "commitments" to Memorial, to its ministries, and to our Lord. *Together*, we will celebrate the gifts each of us brings and the work we will do for the Kingdom! And you ask "Why am I giving? What am I giving to?"

I would answer, not for yourselves and not to yourselves. You are giving for

- food for the Food Pantry
- free Bibles for pantry clients
- gas and utilities and rent payments
for those who knock on our door
- this maintenance and upkeep of
this facility, which *is* God's facility

You are giving

- for staff to help you do ministry in Midland
- for Christian rallies and summer camps
for our children and youth
- for supplies for Vacation Bible School
and adult Church School Classes
- for outreach and mission work beyond

these walls...in Christ's name.

But perhaps mainly we give because God gave to us first. As I mentioned earlier, there *is* strength in numbers, especially when God is among the numbers!

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!