

One World

Jeremiah 29:4-7; Ephesians 4:1-6

Sermon Notes from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
20th Sunday after Pentecost, October 7th, 2018
World Communion Sunday
Matt Matthews

In the fall of 2017, First Presbyterian Church called a new Senior Minister. On February first Matt Matthews arrived with his wife, Rachel, and 24,000 pounds of boxes, books, and furniture, and one 45-pound dog named Casey.

And here's what your new pastor saw: A beautiful, diverse congregation. Lots of people with varied backgrounds and unique stories.

- There are come-heres and locals.
- There are year-rounders and snow birds who go away to Florida in the Winter.
- There are citizens and immigrants.
- There are Chinese, Korean, African, Swedish, Russian, Filipino, Cuban, and people from many other places.
- There are people both from all around the globe and from all over the United States. From Texas, Michigan, California, Virginia, South Carolina, Chicago, Pesotum, Philo, St. Joseph, Paxton, even—Urbana.

We each are shaped by our own family of origin. We each are plugged into different branches of the same family tree.

- We think differently.
- We may vote differently.
- Some of us sing God's praises in the choir.
- Some of us practice disciplines of silence.
- Some of us are interested in studying Pakistan and Muslim-Christian relations.
- Some of us read Dorothy Franks; others read Viktor Frankel.

The diversity of our church and our wider community is a wonder to me.

But while we are diverse, distinct, and different, we are, thank God, united. We are one world, created and redeemed by one God. And we, the church, are many people who serve the same God in diverse and creative ways. In this way, we are a whole-world people who share one mission: to love God, to love each other, and to love the whole world.

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Speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, God tells the exiled children of Israel to bloom where they are planted. The people of Jerusalem were carted off in exile to Babylon. God tells them to settle in their new land. Plant gardens. Dig wells. Take husbands and wives. “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Love your family. Love your kin. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Meet and love the people you don't know. Love the newcomer. Love and respect the old-timer. Love everybody in your city. Love the world.

The social worker Jane Addams lived by this ideal. She said, “The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.”

This is the work our diverse community is called to do. Almost a year ago, you called me and Rachel to join you. I'm glad to share this calling. I look around and I see that we bring all sorts of passions and skills to this ministry. Our team is well-equipped. I look around, and I am grateful.

As Paul encouraged the church at Ephesus in *their* mission, Paul encourages us in *our* mission:

... bear with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

May we never let our differences diminish our efforts to be the church of Jesus Christ—loving God by loving one another, loving God by loving the whole,
wide
world.

AMEN.