

## How Will We Find One Another?

People of God – people sourced by immeasurable Love, I invite us to wonder together this morning: How will we find one another? The love of God has drawn us together on this early autumn morning – via livestream and here in our house of worship, which is on land which the Wahpekute Dakota people and others have loved for millennia before us.

As we move into this time of wondering, let's pause to pray. Holy Spirit, we long for your loving energy to both affirm and challenge us today. Lead us to new understanding of way we can find one another and nurture life-giving relationships within community. Guide the meditations of our hearts and minds, we pray. Amen.

Friends in faith, today's scripture readings invite us to wonder about how we might more effectively reach out to others and be more receptive to another reaching out to us. Let's take a moment to wonder about the circumstances in which we tend to reach out to one another. And let's hold a posture of curiosity about whether or not we are effectively finding another when we make efforts to reach out. By finding one another, I mean seeing and hearing one another clearly enough that the other feels seen and heard.

I invite you to close your eyes if that helps you bring to mind a particular experience. To whom have you recently made an intentional effort to reach out in some way? And what was the circumstance that inspired or at least spurred you to reach out to that person? Opening our eyes to one another, might we name aloud a few circumstances? Not naming the person, but the kinds of situations that have led us to reach out.

*[Offering flowers from one's own garden to transplant and add beauty to someone else's space. Someone in a medical crisis. Responding to an email from someone with whom we hadn't had contact for several years.]*

I invite you to close your eyes again for a moment to focus your attention on yourself. In what recent circumstance of your life did either someone have impact by reaching out to you or you longed from someone to reach out to you but no one did? What was that circumstance, that situation in which you needed caring company? Opening our eyes to one another again, might we be brave to name aloud a few circumstances in which you have needed someone to reach out to you (whether or not they did)? *[In a time of frustration, words of encouragement have reached us effectively. Physical help and presence with a project.]*

Again, I encourage us to stay curious about whether or not we have the positive impact of effectively finding one another (seeing and hearing one another to an extent that we feel seen or heard). Let's turn to our scripture readings for the lessons they might offer regarding finding and being found by one another.

In the reading from the book of Numbers, we come alongside Moses as he leads the migrating Israelite people. They have experienced liberation from enslavement under the Pharaoh in Egypt. Like many people groups across time and space, they felt a sense that God was leading them toward a space and time of prosperity. However, at the juncture of today's reading, they are losing patience as their journey has begun to feel like wandering – exhausting and possibly hopeless wandering. So the people turn to their leader, Moses, to express their frustration.

We heard: *“The crowd among them had a strong craving, and the Israelites also wept again and said, “If only we had meat to eat!*

*We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic, but now our strength is dried up...*" I notice that I and others sometimes have too little patience when hearing a complaint. However, a complaint often reveals a loss or pain that someone is experiencing. And patiently holding space to hear someone's complaint is one effective way to show compassion and possibly help a person feel seen, heard, found. I invite you to wonder if coming days: do you exercise patience both in your own circumstances and in the circumstances others present? Can you find and honor the loss or pain below the surface of the frustration in a complaint?

The reading from Numbers continued: *"...Moses was displeased. So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a wet nurse carries a nursing child... I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me."* Moses chose vulnerability, humility and honesty. He chose to step toward the love of God and the support of his community, admitting that he could not lead them if depending only on his own capacity. It must have felt awkward and maybe even momentarily defeating for him. But, wow, was he brave! And God used the space and power released by Moses to empower others to lead alongside Moses.

The reading from Numbers continued: *"So the Lord said to Moses, 'Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting and have them take their place there with you.'*..."

*Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders, and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.*” Vulnerability, humility and honesty are life-giving threads that we need to weave into our ways of interacting with others – the ways that can lead to finding one another.

The reading from Numbers once again continued: *“Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’ And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, ‘My lord Moses, stop them!’ But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put the spirit on them!’”* Misguided pride and defensiveness in a leader often betray insecurity and fear. Moses chose love and partnership in ministry over fear and isolation. This is what we are attempting to embody as a congregation. May it influence how we act in our other communities as well.

Let’s turn briefly to the reading from the epistle of James. The writer encourages followers of Jesus, then and now, to find one another in several circumstances we have all experienced – some of which were echoed the things that were shared several of you earlier in this message.

The author of James asks: *“Are any among you **sick**? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them...”* We and our beloved ones experience sickness – illness in our bodies, minds, and spirits. We do well to reach out to others to pray with us in those times.

And we do well to be open with our senses to those who may need to be prayed over in times of sickness.

The author of James encourages: “...**confess** your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” I love the connection between confession and healing. “...**confess** your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” Friends, we do inflict harm on one another in all of the circles of our lives. We do hurt one another from time to time. We also do it without sometimes realizing the effect we have on others. So, we do well to be brave and confess when we sense that we have caused hurt in another, because that will open a door to healing. And we are brave to name our hurt when the one who has hurt us does not seem to realize it. That also opens the window to being seen and heard and found.

And finally, the author of James implores us: “...if anyone among you **wanders from the truth** and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” Sin is always a push-button word. The word “sin” in the original Greek is connected to a target game in which to sin is when the arrow misses the mark. So, we have the target of love of God and self and other, and sometimes we misfire and miss the aim – we do! “...if anyone among you **wanders from the truth** and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” So, sin is straying from the love of self, and God, and other. And if, again, we can sense one another well enough to find each other and be open to being found, we will be saved from the death in our whole self and especially in our soul – our gut.

And we have an epidemic of loneliness of which we have spoken in our recent conversations in our strategic visioning process. How can we combat the loneliness that we can so often feel? In all the communities in which we sometimes are wandering, may we be found and may we eradicate that loneliness.

In this congregation of St. Croix United Church, I have found people who have helped me to feel seen and heard. And one of my great hopes for each of us is that you will also look around (perhaps look around and make eye contact with someone... or not, if you wish... either way is fine). But we can look around. We can increase our looking around and see that there are loving people who will dare to look one another in the eye in times of joy and in times of challenge.

I was reminded this week of how much I adore the work of Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, two musicians who have created music for several musicals in recent years – *The Greatest Showman*, *La La Land*, and here are lyrics to a song called “You Will Be Found,” for the movie musical *Dear Evan Hanson*.

I invite you into a posture of holding your hands open (relaxed, maybe on your lap) and holding your spirits open to how these words relate to your own life, to the life of someone you love, and to our life as a congregation.

*“Have you ever felt like nobody was there?  
Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere?  
Have you ever felt like you could disappear?  
Like you could fall, and no one would hear?  
Well, let that lonely feeling wash away  
Maybe there's a reason to believe you'll be okay*

*'Cause when you don't feel strong enough to stand  
You can reach, reach out your hand"*

Friends, so often and so beautifully Jesus reached, reached out his hand. Moses did it as well and all of his companions. And now that is our work to do. The love of God will embolden us in that work. May we find and be found by one another – in this community and in ever-widening circles, because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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St. Croix United Church | Bayport, MN

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Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29; James 5:13-20