

"When Everyone Leads", "When Fear Shakes, May Faith Shine", "When Faith Shines", "When We Are One", "When We Have Shared Vision", "When We Have Jesus" ... From the start of the new calendar year to today, we have been on a journey together of becoming united in mission and ministry, Team God, Team Jesus. Today, we take another step forward in our journey together by unpacking "When We Have Mutual Respect." Along with having a shared vision, having and demonstrating mutual respect is also key to being ONE.

Every time I hear the word respect, I can't help but think of *R.E.S.P.E.C.T* by Aretha Franklin. In that song she sings, "Everyone wants a little respect (just a little bit)." Where? At home, at work. When? All the time. From whom? Our spouse, our kids, our boss, our friends. She is right and what she sings is truthful, but Aretha Franklin is not who we worship. Good thing for us, the respect she does sing can be found in God's word as a cornerstone of faith and community.

We will begin with **Luke 6:31-36**.

I believe these words in Luke 6 are part of some of the hardest teachings of Jesus to swallow. It is one of those passages that take "fair-weather", "partly committed", "one foot in and the other foot out" Christians and pushes them to their limits. Their conditions come out and they say to Jesus, "I can do this, and I can do that, but love my enemies, help those who are bad, lend without interest, and I think we can add, respect those that think different from me, that is too far. I won't do it." And in their minds, there are many justifications for why.

In all seriousness, when we read this text we think, "You want me to do what now? You want me to love my enemies? You want me to do good to someone even if they are bad? You want me to lend my stuff to someone when I know I won't get anything back from them?" When we hear it, we want to look back at Jesus and say, "Do you hear your own words? Do you honestly think what you are saying makes any sense?" And to that Jesus would say, "You bet I do! And of course, it doesn't make sense to you, but trust me, it will be more beneficial for everyone when you do! You don't want the alternative! Besides, it is what I have done for you!" Everything Jesus teaches, whether in words or in actions, is intentional and meant for us to follow for a very, very, good reason.

I alluded to it a moment ago, but I think we could very easily add "respect to others" as a part of this philanthropic, humanitarian, teaching Jesus issues. I say that because respect appears in other gospel lessons as well as the teachings of the apostles as they go out to spread God's word through Jesus' teachings. What they reiterate is that R.E.S.P.E.C.T. is a cornerstone of faith and community.

Matthew 5:16... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Romans 12:10... Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other.

Romans 13:7... Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Philippians 2:3... Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Colossians 3:17... And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

1 Peter 2:17... Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Take a look at today's bulletin cover. It is a painting of a cross. This particular rendering of a cross is developed using a technique of overlapping brushstrokes of various colors along the same vertical and horizontal axes, forming a single object from multiple layers.

We have talked about the image of the cross before and how it serves as a symbol for the Christian church. A symbol of what you might ask. Historically, the cross was a symbol of death, used by the Romans to humiliate and crucify the worst of criminals. The cross was not an image one wished to be associated. Yet, God chose the cross as the way in which Jesus would die, in order that the worst affiliated symbol of death could be transformed into the best and most inspirational symbol of true life, through the resurrection of Jesus. Our God has that power. Unmatched. Unlike any other. God also has a thing for dramatic, but mostly because I think God knows that is what we need to pay attention. Thank God for all that, right?!

As we consider the image of the cross, I would like to invite you to label the cross on your bulletin. The vertical axis is the divine axis: "Jesus" can be at the bottom and "God" at the top. This axis is vertical because it is what grounds us and bridges us from earth to earth. It is also what is necessary to then hold up the horizontal axis. The horizontal axis is the human axis: "Others" can be on the left and "Church" on the right. This axis is horizontal in nature, just like the arms of Christ opened wide to welcome us in.

I used this image a couple weeks ago with our confirmation class to describe what we are devoted to in life. We are devoted to God, Jesus, Others, and the Church. (Finger up and down) God as our creator and maker. Jesus as our Lord and Savior. God and Jesus fill us with purpose and possibility and worth. (Finger side to side) Others as our community, including those that are strangers now but could be friends. Church as our brothers and sisters in faith (family if you will). Others and

Church give us belonging and opportunity to be in relationship with both those we know and those we don't know to experience, explore, discover, grow, play, laugh, cry, support, serve, walk with, respect.

The entirety of our life can be found and lived fully in the image of the cross. Oh yeah, and that includes the negative space: that is the space on the outside of the primary image of the cross. I sometimes refer to that space as no mans land. It too has meaning. It is the space that holds us when we fall away from our divine purpose and possibility and worth and call to be in relationship with others and church. We are not created nor meant to live in negative space. Out there we float and fall and hither to and fro.

Being ONE with God and others is not always the easy thing, but it is the best thing. Having and showing respect to others is not always the easy thing, but it is the best thing. And we need to do everything we can as God's children, Christ's body, the Church, to embody the mutual respect Christ calls us to. What does that look like? Three notes to close:

It looks like not rushing to judgment: things are not always what they seem they should be to us or what they appear.

Think Before You Judge: One day a doctor rushed into his hospital after getting an emergency call. He quickly changed his clothes and rushed to the surgery room. He saw the boy's father outside the operating room who screamed at the doctor angrily for coming late. The doctor said politely, "I rushed to the hospital as soon as I got your call." He also added, "Calm down! Your son will be okay." Hearing that the boy's father got angry and said, "How can I calm down? You can't understand my situation. If it were to happen to your son, then you would understand how tough it is to not react to some irresponsible doctors who don't care to reach the hospital on time." The doctor said nothing and rushed into the operating room.

After the operation, the doctor informed the boy's father that the operation was successful, and his son was safe. The doctor didn't wait for the father to reply and left. The father got angry and said that the doctor is arrogant. The nurse attending his son said, "The doctor is rushing to the burial ground. His son died in an accident yesterday. He was in the burial ground when he got your call. He is now rushing to the burial ground to complete the burial rituals." The boy's father felt ashamed of his words. (vedantu.com)

It looks like accepting disagreements and differences: knowing that our disagreements and differences help us expand our thought and bring more perspectives into consideration.

"It is okay to disagree with a person, but it is never okay to disrespect a person! You reap what you sow! Determine your harvest carefully by the kindness of the words you speak. Bitter words never produce sweet harvest!" ~ Bishop Dale C. Bronner

It looks like considering others in and through life: knowing that everything you do and say has an impact on others around you, and everything others do and say impacts you.

A Man and A Lamp: Once there was a blind man who lived in a small town. He lived alone all by himself. He always carries a lamp with him. One day he was passing by the street when a group of youngsters saw him with a lamp. They started to make fun of the blind man. One of them started laughing saying, “Hey look at the blind man with the lamp.” The man heard it and replied to the youngsters, “I am carrying this lamp not for myself, it's for people like you who can see but don't notice me, that I'm blind, unless I'm carrying this lamp.” The young travelers felt ashamed of their behavior. They apologized to the blind man. (vedantu.com)

Prayer to close: “Be Respectful: Just do it. So, help us God, Amen.”