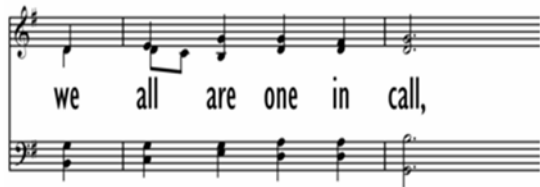




“We are all one in mission, we are all one in call
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.
A single great commission compels us from above
to plan and work together that all may know Christ’s
love”¹



This is the first verse from our last hymn today. It fits quite directly with what we are doing in worship, in fellowship and at our annual meeting.

Perhaps Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus was the basis for Rusty Edwards penning of that hymn. Paul wrote:

I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing 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. (Eph. 4: 1-6)

We are reminded in 1 Corinthians 13 that all of our gifts and talents are as nothing if we do not use them for the glory of God and for the building up of strong relationships among God’s people which then makes possible the coming of the kingdom of God. While we often hear the words from 1 Corinthians at weddings, the love that Paul references in that passage is not erotic love but rather the type of love we are called to evidence for all of God’s creation. First Corinthians acknowledges that the love of God for us and our response to that love is broader and deeper than the love we have for our partners. It also acknowledges that there will come a time when earthly things will end: “For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.”

Rev. Jesse Zink, author of [A Faith for the Future](#),² reminds us that in creation God calls us to live in positive and life-affirming ways with other humans and all of the created order. He suggests that God establishes both vertical and horizontal relationships. The vertical relationship is between each of us and God; our personal relationship with God, to use a term that some of our brothers and sisters use when they ask if you are saved. “Do you have a personal relationship with God?” The answer is clearly yes- however that relationship is for you, you have it simply by virtue of being created by God.

Rev. Zink suggests that a personal relationship with God, while necessary, is not sufficient. We need each other and all of creation. Thus, the horizontal relationship. The horizontal relationship connects you and me, you and others at St. John’s, each of us and those outside these doors. It is what drives us to connect with one another. To live a full life, we need each other. Isolation kills.

¹ Rusty Edwards “We are all one in mission” as found in [Wonder, Love & Praise](#), p. 778.

² Jesse Zink. [A Faith for the Future. Church’s Teachings for a Changing World](#), vol. 3 (New York, Morehouse, 2016).

Scientific studies have shown over and over again that touch and relationship with another living being is critical to human life. How much of it and what type of it can vary while the truth is that we cannot truly flourish without some connection to other living beings.

The two- vertical and horizontal relationships – meet at the cross. It is Jesus at that intersection of vertical and horizontal relationships that tie us together both to and with God and with all of creation. Rev. Zink says “When the love of God and the brokenness of the world meet, the result is crucifixion.”³

When Jesus is the center of our lives, however, we can live most fully into our relationship with God **and** in our relationships with other human beings and the rest of creation. When Jesus is at the center of our lives, then our Collect which prays that “in our time grant us your peace” becomes a possibility. The term “*shalom*” means wholeness or completeness, which we can experience when we rest in God. God does govern all things in heaven and on earth and God does hear our supplications even as we are not always so quick to hear or to see God’s response and “*chesed*” or loving kindness.

Sometimes God surprises us. Even as we acknowledge with the psalmist that God is our hope, our refuge, a strong rock and our sustainer, we can empathize with Jeremiah when the call comes for us to speak out and to stand up. We, too, can cry out that we do not know how to speak or what words to use. God reminds Jeremiah and us that God is with us and God will give us the words to speak when we rest in the Lord. Speaking God’s truth of love and mercy is powerful.

Verse two of our final hymn is: “We are all called for service to witness in God’s name. Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same: to touch the lives of others by God’s surprising grace, so people of all nations may feel God’s warm embrace.”

When you enter Whitlock Hall today, take a moment to look at the bulletin board. The Outreach Committee is asking each of us to put up onto the boards the various ways in which we touch the lives of others through our volunteer efforts. If you see a group you already participate with up on the board, please add your name. If you do not see a group you participate with on the board, there are blank sheets for you to write the name of the group and then your name. We witness to God’s name through our many and varied activities. Make sure we learn how you are connected and how you are helping others feel God’s embrace.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, he was speaking to people who had known him—some probably since shortly after his birth. I imagine that many had felt God’s embrace from their interactions with Jesus prior to that day. They spoke well of him and they were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. Amazed in the sense of surprise and wonder when someone they knew was taking on new roles before their very eyes. And perhaps also amazed in the sense of someone they knew upsetting the apple cart, so to speak, by challenging them to consider their lives and their actions in new ways. Amazement turned to anger, though, when Jesus tells them that “the way we’ve always done things” isn’t enough anymore. God is calling

³ Id, 34.

them just as God is calling us to do new things. To not put new wine in old wineskins but rather to sew new wineskins and put new wine into those new skins.

Our world is not static and God is not static. But changing the ways we've always done something or the ways we've always thought about something is not easy. Our comfort level, our stability, our trust in how life is structured and our values may need to be re-examined. Not everything proposed is something we should do. This is not change for change's sake. It is appropriate to change when the change helps to promote God's realm on earth.

When our gifts and talents are focused on being and doing in ways that bring *chesed* – loving kindness- to all around us and for the glory of God then the change is one we should pursue with all our hearts.

“Now let us be united and let our song be hard. Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word. We are all one in mission, we all are one in call, our varied gifts united by Christ the Lord of all.”⁴ **Amen.**

⁴ Edwards, v.4.