

Over the next several weeks, using the Theme: Learning our WORDS – we will use our reflections on the weekly scripture readings, mainly for the Letter to the Ephesians, to explore the vision and mission of our church as it has been described in the terms that WORDS represents – Worship, Outreach, Relationships, Discipleship and Support.

From time to time, some of you likely write a note or a comment on your worship bulletin, some may even take notes during a sermon, some of you I know re-read or re-listen or re-watch the sermon or the worship service; I want to encourage all of you to do all this. Be encouraged to read and re-read the weekly scripture selections, and as you do, make note of just how often the activities and attitudes relating to and growing out of Worship, Outreach, Relationships, Discipleship and Support, are found in this relatively brief letter. It is our plan to give our full attention to hearing most clearly what God has to say to us as a community of faith and love and service. God is always at work speaking, nudging, and reaching out to us. God has a mission in the world, God invites us to share in God's mission - as Reformed and Presbyterian Christians this is what we affirm! This is why God needs our attention!

It's summer, it's July, we are about as far away from Christmas as we ever get, so I think it is going to be okay if today, right here, right now we can talk about a hidden secret, that today we directly address a tricky, thorny subject – the subject of re-gifting! Re-gifting – just the word itself can bring some of us out in hives! Re-gifting is the passing on of that strange, silly, plain stupid item that we previously received as a gift: that garish over-sized sweater or that odd piece of artwork or Johnny Carson's everlasting fruitcake.

I wonder, if I asked for a show of hands of how many of you know or think you have been victims of re-gifting, how many hands would go up?

Then if I were to ask how many of you have ever re-gifted something, maybe there would be fewer hands raised!?

Re-gifting started as a shadowy art. As a word or phrase, it may well have originated in a 1995 episode of the Seinfeld Show where Dr Tim Whatley re-gifts to Jerry a label-maker he had previously received from Jerry's good friend, Elaine! From those modest beginnings, helped by recent economic woes and a huge increase in the volume of "stuff" in circulation, re-gifting has reached the big time. Now there are rules and guidelines on re-gifting, such as:

- \* Don't tell the recipient their gift has been re-gifted.
- \* Re-wrap the re-gift – don't use the same crumpled. Tired wrapping paper.
- \* Keep track of who your re-gifted item came from originally – so you don't give the same item back to person who first gave it to you.
- \* CLEAN your re-gifted items, if needed.
- \* Don't re-gift half-used gift cards. Don't give a \$25 gift card to Barnes & Noble that has \$14.56 left on it.
- \* Don't re-gift stuff you've owned and used for a while.
- \* Don't re-gift items from out-of-business companies.
- \* Never re-gift free giveaways such as candles, soap, random books, mysterious CDs, obscure software, cheesy jewelry, scarves, fruitcake (fruitcake gets a bad rap – I like good fruitcake!), pens,

cologne, boxed sets of extinct bath products, videos or DVDs obviously acquired on a street corner, socks and any appliances or electronic gear the recipient would be puzzled to receive.

In just a few moments I want to return to the notion of re-gifting, this time in a most important and meaningful sense. I will want then, to describe how we are needed and expected, how we are called and commissioned, how it is our life's work, our purpose, our vocation, to celebrate, to pass on, to offer, to share, to re-gift to and with and for others, our experience of the God who in Jesus Christ loves us utterly!

Our reading in Ephesians today describes the endless and complete love that God has for world, offered to, and received by those who accept God's love as a gift through their trust in Jesus Christ. God's love for the world is God's choice, God's orientation, God's deliberate self-offering. God loves us, not because there is anything good in us. God loves us by God's own choice. God loves us fully, totally, completely, utterly!

This love, that God has for us achieves and does at least three things:

1. In Jesus Christ, we are chosen, chosen to be holy and blameless in love, chosen to belong to God. We are welcomed into a new society and new family, we are adopted as the daughters and sons of the living, loving God.
2. In Jesus Christ, we can know the will and purpose of God, which is all about God's intention to gather up and gather together, to redeem, to renew, to make new all things in heaven and earth.
3. In Jesus Christ, we are sealed in what we believe and in how we live, we are marked by the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth that is the pledge and seal of God's promise to bring redemption to the entire creation.

There is much at stake in what we are focused on this morning. We are touching the very central foundation of our faith. In Jesus we are chosen and called, in Jesus we are able to know the will and purpose of God, in Jesus we are so to live, in the power and under the direction of the Holy Spirit that others might also be drawn to see their lives within God's loving purposes. These truths describe all that we are when we say our "I do" or our "I believe" or our "I will follow" to God.

The Heidelberg Catechism is one of the nine Creeds and Confessions that together make up the Book of Confessions, Part 1 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The very first question of that Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" and the resounding answer and response is: "That I belong--body and soul, in life and in death--not to myself, but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ... By his Holy Spirit he assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

My friends, in Jesus Christ, you belong... you belong to God. In life you belong! In death, you belong! In life and death, you belong to God! In Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, you receive eternal life, so that in the here and now, and for all time, you have been and are set free to live, not for yourself, but for the God to whom you belong.

In Jesus Christ, as the branches of the vine, you belong, you belong to a new family. In Jesus Christ, as branches of the vine you come to share the very will and purpose of God; in Jesus Christ, as branches of the vine, you are marked off by the very life of God in you and through you by means of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In light of all this, in response to THE gift of grace that we have received, we are to be re-gifting God's gift to, with and for others. Re-gifting God's gift requires that we engage with others, our friends, our neighbors, strangers, even our enemies! Re-gifting God's gift invites us to share love, compassion, forgiveness, tenderness, humility with others. Re-gifting God's gift requires us to live justly, to make peace, by live more simply in order that others may simply live. Re-gifting God's gift means that we demonstrate in both our inward and outward life that the centre of all that we are is the God who loves the world. Re-gifting God's gift calls us forward into avenues of service in the church and community: with and for our children,  
alongside our youth,  
on behalf of the weak and wavering, the overlooked and the ignored  
    in the Hope Garden  
        in sharing care and compassion as a deacon or a shepherd  
            in making music to the glory of God

Offering willingly to God our gifts and skills, our time, talents and treasure  
Going out of our way, to be on God's way  
Listening to those who are lonely or who are hurting  
    Encouraging the fearful  
        Speaking the truth, in love, to those who are facing temptation.

We state our vision here at Oakland Avenue in the phrase: We are the Body of Christ. This phrase, these words, must is not simple, they are not just words. Instead, let us hear this phrase as our calling, our commitment, our charge, "We are the Body of Christ"! Let us never use that phrase without remembering that Christ gave away His life, that Christ laid down His life and that Christ poured out His life for the life of the world. So too must we. To be the Body of Christ, is to serve, to live out the promises of God that all people can belong to God, that all people can come to know God's will, that all people can know the presence of God in their lives by the Holy Spirit. "We are the Body of Christ" as such we must always be seeking in all that we are and do, to be re-gifting God's gift, re-gifting God's gift of love. Amen.