

What's In Your Wallet: Unlimited Connection

Third in a Stewardship Series

But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. Ephesians 4:11

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Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Intro Video - Stillabowers

Prayer - God of connections, show us today, the unlimited connections found in you. Amen

Message

It is easy to see how connections happen like the Stillabowers explain it did for them, but in a world of 6.6 billion people, it is hard to believe that we could be connected to everyone else through no more than six connections. That is the premise of the movie, "Six Degrees of Separation?" It's a fascinating take on the connections every person has to everyone else on the planet.

The premise of the film is that you are connected to everyone else in the world through no more than six connections. Effectively it says that humanity is just one big network, all linked by chains of acquaintance, in essence then, you are just six introductions away from any other person on the planet.

People who network understand this concept well and use it to their advantage. They contact someone, who knows someone, who knows someone else who can help them with what they need. And according to the film, it will take no more than six connections of "someone who knows someone" to get the result.

Today, there are apps and social media platforms built on this same premise. One of those, in particular, is the LinkedIn platform that was built primarily for networking.

For business people trying to “swing a deal” LinkedIn is great because it will show you who is connected to whom up to three levels. It is excellent for making contacts in the business world but has the limitation that you can only connect to other people who are on LinkedIn. Then there is always Facebook too. Who hasn’t looked up an old friend from high school on Facebook and re-connected? Or who hasn’t gotten a friend request from a friend of a friend?

Believe it or not, by studying billions of electronic messages, scientists and statisticians recently confirmed this theory. They worked out that any two strangers are, on average, distanced by precisely 6.6 degrees of separation. In other words, putting fractions aside, you are linked by a string of seven or fewer acquaintances to Denzel Washington, Madonna, the Dalai Lama and the Queen of England.

I said all that to point out what I think followers of Jesus should already know. It is something believers and church goers should already be aware of, recognize, and celebrate and that is that we are all connected. There is a connection between all humanity and a specific connection between those who believe in God and put their faith in Jesus.

What better weekend to explore this concept of connection than this, World Communion Weekend? Christians all over the world join together in the unifying practice of communion this weekend. Also called the the Lord’s Table, the Eucharist, or the Last Supper, this meal is about connecting - with Jesus and remembering his life, love, and sacrifice for us; with others as we accept one another as we are when we come to this table; as a church sharing and supporting one another as the body of Christ / people of God. This table is both a personal and communal connection to Jesus and one another.

As we share today, we share not only with those in this room, those on line, but also with those gathered across town and around the world. We recognize today, just how connected we are through the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

Before the creators of LinkedIn and Facebook or the movie about this six degrees of separation, someone else was talking about connections. The apostle Paul spoke of connection multiple times throughout his writings and emphasized the unity found when we connect through Christ. Today we read from his letter to the Ephesians but it is a common theme within his other letters as well. For Paul, connection to one another through Jesus Christ, was central to the identity, function, and well being of the church.

Read Text - Eph. 4:11-16

The key thought of Paul in this letter is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. Unity in Christ is the foundation of Paul's conviction and writing. Paul is writing here, I believe to both existing and new believers, trying to help them understand how important it is that they find unity and work as one. It is the relationship to Jesus, his presence within us, and our commitment to him that unites us one to another, and in that alone, we should find unity, solidarity, and peace.

When we don't, chaos, tension, and struggle ensues. One commentator describes it this way:

Without Christ there is nothing but disunity and disharmony. Humanity's dominion has broken the social union which should exist; Humanity is divided man from man; class from class; nation from nation; ideology from ideology; Gentile from Jew. In every human there is a tension; every human is a walking civil war, torn between the desire for good and the desire for evil; he hates his sins and loves them at one and the same time. Worst of all there is disharmony between God and humanity. Humanity, who was meant to be in fellowship with God, is estranged from God. So, then in this world without Christ, there is nothing but disunity (Barclay 66).

Sounds like it could have been written today, and not in 1954.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul deals with this conception of the unity in Christ. In the second three chapters, he has much to say of the place of the church in God's plan to bring about unity. It is here that we find the well known phrase, *the body of Christ*.

We talk a great deal about that here at Grace UMC - the body of Christ. We believe we are to be that body and that we all make up a part of the body - that everyone has a place, gift, or role within the body. We believe we are to find ways to connect and engage with one another and the community to be the hands and feet of Christ's and a voice to speak Christ's love to the world.

Christ was and is God's instrument of reconciliation - God's way of connecting with humanity. The church is now Christ's instrument of reconciliation - Christ's way of reconnecting with humanity. The way we are connected to each other and the way we connect with others is the core of who we are AND a big part of what's in our wallets. It is the unlimited connections we are a part of and can be a part of when we give of ourselves to God and to the ministry of the church. It takes the connection and gifts of all of us to be and do church in our world; to walk through and navigate life together when we are all different, to be a light of Christ and a safe place for all God's people in our community; and to bring about transformation.

This weekend we remember, celebrate, and partake in perhaps the greatest symbol of connection, that of communion. At this table, we are connected through divine mystery. We are connected through Christ's forgiveness, God's mercy, and our humanity. We are connected with those around the world who share in this meal with us and us with them. We are connected in our brokenness, our guilt and sin, our need for forgiveness, and our longing for things to make sense in our world. We are connected in what is found to be good, beautiful and true in Christ. We are connected in ways we probably don't even know but God does.

When you answer the question, “what’s in your wallet?” remember to think about your connections - how you are connected, where you are connected, and then ask yourself “how can God use me and my connections to deepen my faith and further God’s kingdom?” Think about new ways to connect and how God might use new opportunities and relationships to deepen your faith and grow your understanding of living for God.

May we come to realize through the giving of our prayers, presence, and service that we are a part of God's unlimited connections. May we come to see that what we give can become the next connection for someone else, for ourselves, and for the church. May we pause and give thanks for the connecting power of this table. Amen