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**Pentecost 15 –September 18, 2022 Everyday Disciples**

**“Three Verbs: Gather, Grow, Give”**

**Read: Ephesians 4: 1 - 16 / Memorize: Ephesians 4: 16**

I gave you three words last week that we’re going to be focusing on in these three weeks: Gather, Grow and Give. This week we’re talking about Gather and Grow. People can be diverse in many ways, but there is one thing we share in common: the need to gather.

Gathering is an important part of our lives. The great festival of gathering, Thanksgiving, is just around the corner. Families will travel from near and far to get together. They’ll overcome all sorts of hardships to do it.

God also thought gathering was important. When He called Israel into being, He set up a series of feasts and festivals and told them to gather for them. Many times, they included eating. They gathered in obedience to His command, as we do also.

Gathering is among the top three in of the commandments. “Remember the Sabbath Day,” is a way of saying, gather. We went through a time of not gathering. It was painful and we’re still feeling the effects of it.

When we could finally gather there was great rejoicing. At the same time, there were fewer of us who have gathered and still are. We know that some are concerned because they have vulnerabilities that could endanger them. At the same time, scripture reminds us that gathering together is vital to the life of the church and to us as everyday disciples.

Some have perhaps filled that time of gathering with new things. Perhaps they gather elsewhere? For some, the flame of faith may have grown dimmer. Others may not be sure that we care about them or that it’s important to gather. Here’s an area where we can each have a great impact. When you see someone, if you’ve missed them, make sure you tell them that.

Gathering is not only important to us it's important to many of the creatures that God created. Perhaps you've heard that the monarchs are in trouble. It's popped up in the number of articles that I have read recently. They are incredible creatures.

Every autumn, millions of monarchs from all over the eastern United States and Canada migrate thousands of miles to a small handful of sites in Mexico where they rest for the winter. Then in the spring, they begin their return trip north. Here's the amazing thing, no individual monarch ever makes the trip to Mexico and back.

A butterfly that leaves the Adirondack Mountains in New York will fly all the way to Mexico and spend the winter. In March, their children begin the trip northward. Its children will continue northward, laying eggs along the way until some of them, maybe three or four generations later, make it back to the mountains of New York. When August comes, they will head south again, aiming for the exact place their great-great grandparents visited, a place they have never been.

A butterfly expert reports: "The monarchs always migrate in community and depend on each other. Although a single monarch may make it from New York to Mexico, it is the next generations which complete the journey." We can say the same thing for those who compose the Body of Christ: "No one completes their journey solo. It is only in community that we discover the fullness of God's plan."

If we don't gather, we may miss out on part of God's plan. It is only in community that we discover what God has in mind for us. That's why we gather, grow and give. We Gather to worship God, to Grow in faith and Give of ourselves.

We gather to hear the Word and to eat and drink the Body and Blood of in the meal Jesus gave us, which strengthens us in faith and in love for one another. I said last week we care FOR one another because we care ABOUT one another. People often mention they feel that when they come here. That is a strength that we dare not take for granted.

People long to belong to a community. They're looking for relationships which help them to grow in faith. They're looking for Jesus so they can experience the changed lives we talk about each week. We gather to support and encourage one another because God calls us to do that.

We don't often gather with other parts of the Body of Christ, but we did it to celebrate Maggie Wiegand's life and faith. It was intriguing to see people of disparate groups sing the praises of God to honor a friend who always thought it was important to gather.

There is one thing we really want to be careful about when we gather. We don't want our gatherings to become holy cliques, in which we leave some on the outside. We want to be aware that all need to be welcomed and accepted as we gather. All need to have the opportunities to grow in their faith.

Gathering is not just about filling ourselves up. We are coming together to remember that God has called us. In the Gospel of John Jesus tells us that there are other sheep who are "not part of this sheep pen." He then goes on to say, "I must bring them also." Even as we gather, we remember it's not just about us, it's for all.

Another way in which we gather is in learning experiences such as Sunday School, adult studies and growth groups. We often learn that the combined wisdom of the group is greater than any one of us. I may read a passage of scripture and it may seem odd to me. As we talk about it, suddenly, because of someone's insight, I come to better understand it and it comes to life for me.

I've had people say that they don't come to adult studies because they don't know much about scripture. Here's the dilemma, if you don't come, you'll never get to know more. Even if you dutifully read the Bible each day, without others, you won't understand as much. Acceptance and encouragement can help people overcome their reluctance.

Lutherans are known as people of the Word. Unfortunately, we don't always apply it. We gather and grow is to encourage one another to fulfill the Great Commission to go and make disciples. Once again, we want to remember that it's not a solitary experience. The Holy Spirit is in partnership with us. Other Christians can also be.

It might just start as a personal friendship. Then you invite some other friends from church, so you can get to know each other. As the friendships grow you might want to work on a project together. This is especially the case for men. We do better when we have a task that brings us together.

All the while, we're praying for them and encouraging each other. We want to create relationships that will enable us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ, while at the same time asking the Holy Spirit to reveal that time when we can share that love of God in a more impactful way.

There is always a danger that we think that church is about "me." A number of years ago I can remember seeing a video by that title: "Me Church." When I googled it, what came up was not as cute as what I'm telling you. That's a warning for you, if you decide to go looking for it. The one I remember used a lot of humor to get the point across.

In the video, there's a woman at her desk who says, "My life is so busy; I'd like a church where worship begins when I get there." The voiceover says: "Can do. When you arrive, we will begin." Then it shows a young couple with a baby. He says, "This little guy has a mind of his own. We want a church where, if he screams, we don't feel like the bad guys." The voiceover says, "Got it! At "Me Church" you can stay and everybody else will leave."

A third asks, "Can I get my car buffed and waxed, while I'm at church?" The voiceover says, "Of course, and how about an oil change and lube?" And the final caption: "Me Church: the church where it's all about you!"

Perhaps you remember the opening line from Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Life." It starts, "It's not about you!" We gather and grow because God calls us to do it. We gather and grow in faith, wisdom and service.

We gather and grow so that others can learn about Jesus. We gather so that we may grow in our belief that Jesus has called us to be His disciples. As His everyday disciples, we seek to be obedient to His command to make disciples. We know how to say it: "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" Disciples are called to live out that calling. Whenever church becomes about personal preferences, we are forgetting why we gather.

As we gather and grow we become more like Jesus. His Spirit leads us in gathering and growing. God's intention is that we will gather and grow to His glory and our good.

Here's your question: How will you Gather and Grow for the Glory of God?