

Faith Mennonite Church  
June 11, 2017  
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**Bind us together: Setting up the loom**  
*Luke 12:32-40, 48*

Issues of peace, justice, and inclusion are not new to this congregation. The number of book studies and adult classes on topics related to indigenous and racial justice during the past couple years attests to this. But each of those classes always ends with the question: what next? What more can we do? These were the questions that the class which studied Drew Hart's book, *Trouble I've Seen*, were asking this spring. And just days after the final day of that class, the *Leader* magazine arrived. The *Leader* is a Mennonite magazine that offers "practical, hands-on ideas for effective ministry" in our churches. The summer 2017 issue included suggestions for a worship series titled "Bind us Together," which aims to deepen our relationships with "sisters and brothers of faith who are also persons of a marginalized group." It seemed like a good focus for our summer worship.

Often during the summer here at Faith, we invite members of the congregation to share their stories of faith. This summer will be no different. Ry and I will step back from preaching for the most part as we invite a number of you and several invited guests to speak out of your/their particular experiences, with the hope of enriching the fabric of our congregational life and deepening connections to persons and situations that we care about.

The theme, “Bind us together,” elicits an image of braiding or weaving. We have at least two weavers in our congregation. Beth Richardson knows the process thoroughly, from spinning wool into yarn, to setting up the warp threads of a loom, to weaving the weft threads that form tapestries. Rudy Okerlund is a beginner, having taken a weaving class this past winter that resulted in a sampler. Are there other weavers? Or braiders, or knitters, or crocheters? If so, we’d be glad for you to bring a piece of your work to add to our table.

When we see a completed tapestry, we generally do not notice the warp threads, nor do we envision the loom on which it was produced. We may not even think of the person who did the tedious work of weaving, one row at a time. Weaving requires patience. Weaving requires a vision by the artist of what will be created, of what is possible. While I do not know from experience, I can imagine that, like most any undertaking, weaving has moments of pain. Perhaps back pain from sitting for too long in one position. Perhaps the pain of realizing that you miscounted rows or lost the pattern and need to backtrack.

Our experience this summer will likely bring joy and pain. Joy, as we consider how our fabric can become more beautiful as we weave in additional colored and textured threads. Pain, as we find that some of our warp threads, hidden for the most part, are connected to historical events and patterns that are filled with troubling circumstances and outcomes, and that have served to separate rather than bind us to others. We will have the opportunity to confess our lack of awareness and/or our failure to acknowledge the connections. And we will celebrate the call to let ourselves become more deeply entwined with others.

This morning we will begin with the warp threads, preparing us for the weaving we will do in subsequent Sundays.

We turn to the words of Jesus, recorded by Luke, to set the warp, to consider what is needed, what is foundational as we begin this project.

The first warp thread in this morning's passage, is that favorite phrase of Jesus: "Do not be afraid." Here it is affectionately spoken, "Do not be afraid, little flock." "Do not be afraid, for it is your heavenly parent's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." We can begin this project without fear. Even as we anticipate some pain along the way, Jesus assures us that this is the path of the kingdom. The kingdom is not something we will reach if we "get it right." No, the kingdom is here, it is within and round about us. It is the kingdom that makes us realize how important this work is. It is the kingdom that assures us we have no reason to be afraid. We tie the first warp thread with humility but confidence. Do not be afraid.

The next warp thread is another favorite of Jesus: "Sell your possessions, and give alms." Don't get hung up with accumulating material possessions, things that wear out and rot. Instead, focus on relationships. Use your possessions to build relationships, rather than to erect walls to keep people away. Marginalization occurs in society largely because of how resources are distributed. Some people and communities end up with more than enough leaving other people and communities with too little. "Do not be afraid" and "Sell your possessions" are co-dependent and enable one another—in a healthy way! When we trust that God will care for us, we cling less tightly to material security. When we have less, we have less reason to fear that we will lose something or that someone will take something from us. Think about your reaction when a panhandler approaches you on the street. If you're like me, if my pockets are empty, I am much more at ease. I can honestly and

without calculating simply say, “I’m sorry, I don’t have any cash.” When there is something in my pockets, however, I fear the encounter. I see this person as someone who wants something that I have. I don’t want to be heartless yet I wonder whether my money will be used in a good way. Will it really help? I begin to scrutinize the other rather than to simply accept them as a fellow human. As we tighten the second thread we hear Jesus say: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

A third warp thread is attentiveness, readiness. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like those who are waiting...” The work of “binding us together” is not easy; it will not just happen if we sing “They’ll know we are Christians by our love” enough times. No, it takes deliberate action. We dress for action and we light our lamps by doing exactly what we’ve been doing: reading and listening to the voices of people in our world who experience injustice, whose life experiences are very different from our own. We dress for action and we light our lamps as we seek out the guidance of persons and organizations like Black Lives Matters and the Asamblea de Derechos Civiles (Civil Rights Assembly), as we travel to Standing Rock and listen to the prayers of the indigenous elders, as we participate in Mennonite Disaster Service projects and learning tours in New Orleans, as we worship with our neighbors at Impact Living Christian Center, as we listen to the stories of students, clients, neighbors, and coworkers. “Blessed are those whom the master finds alert when he comes ... he will have them sit down to eat, and he will serve them!” As we tighten the third warp thread and begin taking action, we arrive at a banquet table where everyone is present and all eat and are filled!

A final warp thread is Jesus' reminder that "...to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." Oh, come on, Jesus, this is starting to feel like a heavy responsibility. Are you trying to motivate us by guilt? I don't know about others here, but when I feel guilty, I'm not at my best. Maybe there's another, more positive way, to think about this. Friday night Gerald and I went to the final concert of the season by St Paul Chamber Orchestra. The high level of musicality and precision of this orchestra always moves us. Friday night two orchestra members who are retiring were honored. One has been in the orchestra for 42 years, the other for 40. To be long-term performers and leaders in a chamber orchestra, where new, young talent is constantly being recruited and integrated, these two have certainly needed to perpetually practice and perfect their skill. They could never simply coast along. Friday's program included a new composition with intricate sounds and rhythms that demanded absolute concentration and precision. It was demanding, no doubt, but because the members of this orchestra have been entrusted with such a great talent, they did it. And they will continue to do even more.

So let us think of this work of "binding us together" as an opportunity to play even sweeter music. We *have* been given so much....think of all the gifts of this community—the reason we are here! We *have* been entrusted with so much: a place at the table in the Kingdom of God...a rich heritage of the gospel of peace...hearts that are full of love...a new generation growing up in our midst....elders with years of experience and wisdom...access to wonderful education and professional development. May all that we have and enjoy spur us to deeper

relationships and wider circles of sharing and caring, of giving and receiving.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your [heavenly Parent’s] good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” Bind us together!