

“Wrapped in Love”

1st Corinthians 12:12-22

Good Morning Church. My name is Katja Falker, and I am so glad to be here with you on this beautiful Sunday. It is such a privilege to worship with you today, in person and online, as Pastor Eric, who happens to be my husband, is spending the morning with our brothers and sisters in Painesdale.

Please know that you are welcome here whether this is your first time attending one of our worship services or you call Grace your home. You are in the right place this morning.

Please join me in prayer before we take a deeper look at our scripture today:

Almighty Father, we are here to receive your Word. We know that you have something to tell us today, and we are ready to listen. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

If you are like me, you have very much enjoyed the beautiful spring weather we've been gifted with these past few days. The sunshine and rain have been such a blessing and are certainly helping all the plants around us to wake up from their sleep and start growing again. The birds have returned and are gracing us with their songs again, which I really enjoy, especially while I have my morning cup of coffee before work.

Just like spring brings all the plants, who have hibernated all winter and looked dead and useless, back to life, I like to repurpose old things and make them new and beautiful once again.

One of my favorite hobbies is sewing. I love to be able to take pieces of fabric and make them into something that will be loved until it no longer serves the purpose it was made for.

My Mother-in-Law and I have been sewing together since before my husband and I got married. We have made clothes, baby bibs, hammock chairs, hooded towels, and lots of other things.

One of our favorite projects to work on are quilts. They take a lot of work and patience to put together and make them usable, but there is nothing quite like being able to wrap yourself in a quilt once it is finished.

In November of 2020 we took some time to organize the sewing closet in Tawas while our men were at deer camp. Karlene had received a box from her cousin Carol and we eagerly opened it to see what kind of treasures were inside. To our surprise and delight, the box was filled with hand-cut pieces of fabrics, partially finished quilts, and pattern pieces for other quilts.

Every one of those fabric pieces had been lovingly cut by Karlene’s grandmother Hazel and her sister over sixty years ago. As we pulled more and more pieces out of the box, we separated and sorted those pieces and started quilt squares to come up with a plan as to who would work on which project. It took us two days and aloof the office and half of the living room were covered in fabric pieces.

When we came back to Houghton after Thanksgiving, I started working on a quilt and every time I touched one of these fabric pieces or the pattern pieces that Pastor Eric’s great-grandmother cut out, I was amazed at the love I could feel across the decades.

Working on these projects reminds me of how our church, and all churches, strive to be the best they can be.

While the individual pieces of the quilts I have been putting together are all different; they have different colors, their shapes are slightly different despite being cut using the same pattern, and the age of the fabrics are different, they all fit together in a wonderful way. Most of the pieces we found were not enough for a whole quilt, so I had to supplement with other fabrics to finish these beautiful projects.

In our scripture reading today we learned that we are all part of the body of Christ and that the body can only function correctly when all of its separate parts work together in unity. Even though every body part looks different and has a different job, every single part of the body is important to the whole. If you have ever broken a bone, or had surgery, you are probably aware how hard it is for your body to function without all of its parts doing what they are designed to do.

I picked this particular scripture today because I think that it has a lot of parallels to quilting. Just like the different parts of the body of Christ are unique, so is every piece of fabric I have ever used in a sewing project. These pieces of fabric are very much like the members of our church. We have people of all ages, sizes, and genetic make-ups. We have people who don’t remember a time in their lives when they weren’t Christians. They were shaped in the likeness of Christ sixty, seventy, eighty, or even more years

ago when they chose to follow Jesus. These members are like the quilt pieces that were cut by my mother-in-law’s grandmother.

Then we have those who maybe grew up in the church and for a while went elsewhere, chasing their dreams, or careers and eventually were brought back and comfortably fell into the life Christ called them to, because they grew up learning about his love. These are the people I was reminded of when I was scouring second-hand stores for old fabrics I could use to supplement the quilts I was working on.

And then there are the brand new Christians. Those who are just now being introduced to Jesus and his amazing love for us. They are ready and eager to serve, just like the brand new fabrics I am using.

Despite all of these differences, there is the common thread that holds all of these pieces together: The love Jesus has for each and every one of us.

And just like each quilt square is made up of different pieces, each family in our church is made up of different people. While the different squares in a quilt resemble each other, they are just a little bit different because of the unique pieces that went into creating them. Similarly each family in our church is unique, but when we look at them we recognize that they all belong together. The old and the new together make up beautiful pictures just like the squares in this particular quilt.

Our scripture verses this morning reminded us that [1st Corinthians 12] **18** ...God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. **19** If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Working on a quilt like this one helps me appreciate the way God has carefully placed us just where he wants us to be. Choosing the layout of a quilt takes time and lots of thought. This particular quilt contains partial quilt squares that Pastor Eric’s great-great-grandmother lovingly stitched by hand. None of them were finished, and one was damaged so I carefully took time to supplement them with fabric pieces to complete them. Just like those squares, our church families are made up of people of different ages, and each one of them is beautifully complete.

When you look at all the quilt squares together in a quilt, you get an even more beautiful composition. Each piece alone would not make a good quilt, but many pieces together make up this unique lap quilt.

Grace United Methodist Church exists because over 150 years ago faithful Christians chose to come together and provide a place for worship in the Copper Country. Our mission to this day is to invite all people to encounter and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, all for the glory of God. Just like other churches in our denomination we learn and teach about Jesus Christ, we provide counsel to those in need, we worship together, and we live life together the best we know how. We are held together by our common love of Jesus.

To stay with the allegory of our church being like a quilt, every quilt has pieces that connect the quilt squares and a binding that finishes the quilt. Those parts very much remind me of the calling we have as a congregation and the opportunities we use to reach out to those around us. We provide a place of worship, of course, and we are proud to make it as beautiful as we can. We had a wonderful time yesterday, during the spring cleanup. However, our congregation is also involved in different ministries around our community, whether they meet here or our members go elsewhere to be the church.

While a quilt is like a beautiful piece of art, it also usually serves a purpose. What are some words that come to mind when you think of a quilt? (*wait for responses: comfort, warmth, memories...*) Those are all great answers. Warmth and comfort are the words at the forefront of my mind. Every quilt has layers to provide the comforting feeling of a hug.

The Rev. Melanie McCarley from Dedham, MA points out that:

“A really wonderful quilt keeps you warm and lends you strength. It isn’t simply a thing of beauty—it’s immanently practical. The same goes for a church. While it’s true that there are things around us which we see that make this place a home for us—it’s more of what we do which speaks to the purpose of this house of God. It’s what we do that is our reason for being.”

We don’t just come on Sunday mornings for an hour to sit here and listen, although sometimes that is all we can do. We help provide the music for our worship services, we serve as ushers, liturgists, greeters, acolytes, we teach Sunday School, we help with coffee hour, we visit those who are lonely and hurting, and we fellowship with one another. If we as a church expected the pastor to do all of these things by himself, most would not get done. It would be as if we decided to only let our body be able to use its pinky. It would be very hard for our body to function properly.

We are not just a pretty picture on the wall; we are a quilt made to provide warmth and comfort all while being beautiful to look at.

As you can see on the altar rail, not all quilts are the same. Some quilts are old and worn, and have been loved a lot, like this quilt made by Pastor Eric’s grandmother. Some quilts are brand new and still look like a pristine piece of art. There are quilts made from old shirts that have meaning to the owner of the quilt. Some quilts are made for beds and provide warmth and comfort all night; while others are smaller and work well to take off the evening chill, whether indoors or out.

There are quilts who need repairs and warrant them because they are full of love, memories, and comfort, like this T-shirt quilt Pastor Eric’s mom and I worked on before his graduation from Purdue. There are quilts made from the same pattern, yet they look different because of the choice of fabrics and the scale. There are those quilts who seem to not follow a repetitive pattern, like this quilt made by Pastor Eric’s great-grandmother. And there are those quilts who are too fragile to be used any longer, but they are still fondly remembered by those who have loved them for a long time.

1st Corinthians 12:27 says: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” So let us remember that we need to make sure that we all do our part as members of this church. Let us remember that we are all a part of something bigger and that love is indispensable will be a great reminder that every single part counts.

Friends, no matter what the quilt that is Grace United Methodist Church looks like, no matter what part of the life of the quilt we find ourselves in, let us remember that all of us put together, make something beautiful, useful, and loving as representatives of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Precious God, we give thanks for our individual uniqueness and for Jesus Christ who is the thread that binds us together to make a quilt.

We are thankful that we are a part of the body of Christ and that all individuals are precious, and when allowed and helped to discover their God-given gifts, can be a part of our glorious work and quilt that is Grace United Methodist Church.

Grant us the strength to use our gifts and our abilities to glorify God and God’s work today and always.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.