



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

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SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:1-16 John 6:1-21

SERMON: The Secret Lives Of RV's (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

One way to imagine the recent trip to the World Cup in Germany that saw my son Jim and I, and Dave Jones and his son Scott drive 3,000 miles around Germany, would be to merge some aspect of the following movies: National Lampoon's European Vacation, Thelma and Louise, The Odd Couple, The Fast and the Furious, Grumpy Old Men, Days of Lightning, Rain Man, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, RV, Brutus Buckeye Does Europe, It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World and Grumpier Old Men.

Hitting the road, especially in a smallish Recreational Vehicle, with people you know can be one of those make or break experiences. It can be great for friendship and bonding, for making unique and shared memories or it can be a howling disaster! It can be a trip of a lifetime or the final stop in a wonderful friendship. It can be a way into a whole new relationship or a cul-de-sac from which there seems no escape.

You will all be relieved to know that Jim and I are still speaking, that Dave and Scott are still speaking and that all four of us are still speaking to one another! Actually we are speaking a whole lot... mainly about what those other folks in our van did or didn't do that annoyed us! The dishes they left unwashed; the towels they dragged on the floor; the luggage that they scattered in our space; the socks that they seemed to wear for a week; the smells and the noises. Truthfully we had a blast. We had some issues to deal with: a jammed door and a broken key, but we maintained our togetherness and our unity. And we met lots of great people and saw lots of great soccer!

And here we are today, part of another great group that always needs to do some "togetherness". Yes, we could think of Church as the ultimate RV experience. We are always doing so many things together with other people and then once a week, every Sunday, we all climb together into our RV - *our Religious Vehicle* - and we share in another great family reunion!

From the words we read in Ephesians today, as well as in countless places in the Bible, we know that the life of the church is essentially communal, reflecting the family relationship we all have as children of God. The Christian community is held together by and in the "bond of peace"; a bond defined by the virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, dealing with each other with love and being unified in the Spirit. All of these virtues are key to a successful RV vacation and to the life of a healthy church!

Church life is *communal* and church life is also *creedal*. The creed of our RV in Germany was get to as many World Cup games as possible, as quickly as possible! As a Church community we have many, many shared beliefs. We exist as a community of faith: committed to being one body, strengthened by one Spirit, called to one hope, following one Lord, acknowledging one faith, living out one baptism, trusting one God. These beliefs are our roots, our foundations; *this faith is what ties us together*.

Church life is communal and creedal. Church life is also *charismatic*. In Greek the word, "charis" means gift or grace – it gives us words that include charity. The Church as the creedal community bearing the likeness of our Lord is marvelously "graced" and gifted. The church is not intended to be a homogenous group sightseeing its way through the Christian experience. At its best the Church is a community in action, calling upon and using the gifts of people of all different ages, stages and abilities. These gifts and graces are not for our entertainment or amusement. The gifts are to be shared so that all of us might be prepared for ministry – seeing that the church is strengthened in love and faith so it can serve others and so that the whole Church can focus on

the *One who is the Bread of Life*.

In our RV Scott might cook, Jim might sleep, I might drive and Dave, well Dave might make the tea! In the Northminster RV we all have places where we can express our God-given gifts in the life of our church.

Church life is communal, creedal, charismatic and church life is also *caring*. Within our community we are to speak the truth in love. We are not to be bitter or thieving or angry or malicious. We are to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving, as God has forgiven us, as God loves us.

As an aside, notice that there's no mention here of heaven as the ultimate vacation venue. Indeed, the church really "arrives" not when it reaches heaven, *but when it functions fully as the body of Christ in the world*. The church is at its best when everyone has a stake in our shared adventure here and now, and tomorrow, and next week and next year.

Christianity is the ultimate group project where togetherness is a requirement not an optional extra. This togetherness, aided by and expressed through the "unity of the spirit", does and must push the church outward into the world, to engage with people in the joys and struggles of their lives, inviting them to faith and to use their gifts, all of us together in the great adventure of serving God.

To get our RV on the road to our next destination took all of us. There was much to be done: we had to empty our trash, get rid of our gray water and our "unmentionable" water, we had to take on fresh water, disconnect our power line, fold away our chairs and tables, collapse our awning, secure the windows, make sure everything was stowed, close all the cupboards, make sure we had the correct route and maps and then, if we could ever get Dave out of the Tea Shop or the toilet, we could leave! In the same way, every person in the life of our church is needed and wanted. All of you have those certain things that you can already do well, and a few others that you can and are learning to do well. It takes all of us to be willing to step up, do our bit, and then get out of the road so that everyone else can do their bit. With Christ at the centre we are lead forward to unity which is not the same as uniformity. There can and indeed needs to be diversity within unity. There will be differences; people with different gifts, different people with slightly different emphases in their faith but all with a shared focus on serving Christ in God's world, among all God's people.

At this point in the sermon I want to connect this togetherness with our readings these few weeks in John 6 about Jesus the Bread of Life. I recently came across this simple story: As World War II came to an end, many orphaned children, rescued from starvation and afraid of what the next day might bring, were unable to sleep. To help with this problem someone suggested that each of the children be given a small piece of bread to hold at bedtime as a sign that tomorrow there would still be food and hope. Holding this small piece of bread comforted the traumatized youngsters and enabled them to fall asleep. A simple piece of bread brought the miracle of rest to kids ravaged by the obscenities of war.

As members of Northminster - a communal, creedal, charismatic and caring Church - we are all being asked to offer the Bread of Life to any and all who need it, to all who desire it, to all who can benefit from knowing God's love for them in Jesus Christ. For this task God has blessed this Church family with gifts, many, many gifts. All of these gifts are intended to be utilized and shared as we work together in harmony within the community of faith.

Gathered today for our weekly family reunion this is never just a time to swap old stories or look at old photographs. This is a time to listen for God, to pray for the needs of the world, to share life together, to identify those places where God needs our gifts. As I remind you of some of the gifts in our midst, please listen, listen for what it is God is calling you to do and be as together we serve God.

The gift of Hospitality: You love to be a hostess, you enjoy meeting new people, you work in sales. You are needed to be a Welcome Table greeter, welcoming visitors, connecting all members to each other.

The gift of Ministry: You sense a call to some specific form of Christian service, you are an ordained elder or deacon, you keep hearing about some need or way of serving. Step right up and get going.

The gift of Prayer: You peruse the prayer list avidly, other people ask you to pray for them, you know you are close to God when you pray. Make sure you share with others that you pray for them, see if you can connect with others to meet to pray.

The gift of Teaching: You can explain things well, you can speak of your own experiences of God and faith, you have a burden for children or youth or newlyweds or singles. There is always a place for those who can teach English to immigrants, the stories of the Bible to children, the meaning of a maturing faith to teens and adults.

The gift of Giving: You have resources to share, you have know blessing in life, in your career, in your investments, in what you have inherited. There are some specific resources under your control that when released to the life and work of the church will make a profound and significant contribution that nothing else can.

The gift of Compassion: You have a heart for the hurts and pains of the people around you, you sense pain, you know when someone is hurting. Step forward to work with your deacon, get engaged with Congregational Care, visit someone who is a shut-in.

The Northminster RV is ready to move forward to serve God. There is much for us to be doing, lots for us to be excited over and many things that need our attention. As a communal, creedal, charismatic and caring church, there are a growing number of opportunities for all of us to serve God and to serve our neighbor, *offering to each and all the very Bread of Life – Jesus our Lord.*

Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-16

1I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." 9(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

John 6:1-21

1After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." 15When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. 16When evening came,

his disciples went down to the sea, **17**got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. **18**The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. **19**When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. **20**But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." **21**Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

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