

Striving To Build

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone, and welcome to worship. It is so good to be with you. If you haven't met me yet, I am Kathy Hall Stengel. I am one of the pastors here at Pendleton Center and Niagara Falls First United Methodist Church.

And what a glorious day it is because we are alive. If you woke up this morning and you took breath assisted or unassisted, then it is a great day to be alive. And we are going to celebrate that by honoring the Lord be with you.

So let us sing out our thanks that it is another day that we are alive by singing, This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made.

At the end of the service this morning, we are going to be sharing in one of what I think is one of the greatest hymns, Here I Am.

[1 : 44] I would like to ask you now, at the beginning of the service, to join me in prayer because, in fact, here we are, Lord. Let us pray.

O God of all creation, gather us in. Remind us as we gather to worship that you have called us, claimed us, named us.

Prepare us for worship for your word and to be witnesses of that word. Let our hearts cry, here I am. Let our minds open with here I am. And let our ears open as we seek the Holy Spirit to speak to us, crying out, here I am, Lord. Here I am. Amen.

Let our hearts cry, here I am.

Like a dream fly by the water, we never will run dry. Let our hearts cry, here I am. Let our hearts cry, here I am.

[3 : 18] Let our hearts cry, here I am. Our souls with one we desire Just to know you and to make you know You live to me, my life Shine like the sun, make our desire We know we were made for so much more Than for the merry life It's time for us to mourn and us to arrive We were made to thrive Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh You hear your word, we're digging deep

To know our Father's heart To the world we're reaching out To show them who you are There's a weary water flowing through God we thirst the more of you Fill our hearts and flood our souls And what is I?

Just to know you and to make you know me Lift your name on high My life, the sun, may God The sun and my We know we were made for so much more Than ordinary life But for us still more than just the life We were made to die Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable Love unstoppable, anything is possible Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable Love unstoppable, everything is possible Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable Love unstoppable, everything is possible Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable

Love unstoppable, everything is possible Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable Joy unspeakable, faith unsingable Lift your name on high Shine light, shine light Shine light, the sun made darkness run in high We know we were made for so much more Than ordinary life It's time for us still more than just survive We were made to die Oh, we were made to die

As I have said earlier It is good to be with you And we celebrate every person Who is watching us in worship this morning I want to share some announcements with you We have received an overwhelming response To seeking volunteers to help us get ready To open both churches for live worship And we have a lot But we can always use more As we go through these weeks Of being prepared and then carrying out Live in-person worship in our churches I invite you to fill out the friendship card That you can find It's a link that you'll see on the screen As well as the children's activity sheet So I invite you to just click those links One of the other announcements Is that Grief Share is going to begin On August the 20th

[7 : 58] And I invite you to go to our church's website And sign up there Or call the church office If you haven't already seen Or participated in some of our fellowship groups On Facebook I invite you to go and look for that PCUMC Fellowship Group And you can ask to join And then you can participate In devotions and Bible study And music Most days of the week So just check that out We are hoping to soon begin A series of small group gatherings So that we as people of faith Can grow and deepen In not only our faith And our understanding of God's word But our relationships with one another So contact the church If you're interested We'll gather up all those names And start putting some things together Here we are As I said earlier

If you are taking a breath Then you are alive If you were sitting here I would scan the sanctuary And say Nope Not dead yet And so as people of faith I invite us In gratitude To give back that Which we have By sharing in our gifts In our offerings In whatever way Makes the most sense For you You can send it in the mail We still take checks Automatic withdrawal You can contact the church And you can give online All of these ways Are ways for you To demonstrate your gratitude My heart is full I pray that yours will be as well Let us offer our gifts To the Lord Amen As I said earlier Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. God from whom all blessings flow. In Jesus name, Amen. Hey everyone, how are you? It's good to be with you again. I missed you last week.

[13 : 33] I was away doing some other things, but here I am back to be with you as we do junior church. I realize that some of you might not remember my name. My name is Pastor Kathy and I am one of the pastors at the church and I'm doing junior church this summer and really enjoying being with you.

I have some of my toys here. I have a crab that will crab walk across the table and it's kind of fun. I have some Legos here. This ship, oops, Christmas tree fell off.

I have some other Legos here. I have another boat that could probably go with the ship and a spaceship that probably needs to be finished building. Do you like Legos? Do you like to build things and make them work? Sometimes when we're little we do duplos, the bigger blocks, and then when we get older then we get to do Legos. Have you ever stepped on a Lego with your bare feet? Wow, that hurts.

So anyway, I was reading the Bible and our Bible story for today talks about how we who believe in Jesus, we believe in God. Remember, we have the love of God in our hearts so that we can love everybody.

Well, those of us who know that we might read in the Bible where it says that we should be mature.

[15 : 28] Do you know what it means to be mature? Sometimes we don't really like to hear that. Sometimes it's kind of like we're shooting balls and maybe we're gonna hit the camera. Oh my gosh. And somebody says, will you grow up?

You need to act like a grown-up, Pastor Kathy. And I say, oh yeah, you're probably right, but it's a lot of fun. Anyway, there's nobody here for me to hit and they're really softball so I am being careful.

But it sure is fun to squeeze this bear and make the ball pop out of his mouth. Does anybody ever tell you you need to act like you're older, maybe more like if you're six, then maybe you should act a little older, maybe you're messing around with stuff in your room and your mom wants you to pick up your toys and putting put them away. But instead, you lay on the floor and just keep playing with them. We all do that sometimes. And sometimes teachers might even say, you know, you know, you know, you're not going to be a little older, you're not going to be a little older.

You know, you're not going to be a little older. You're not going to be a little older. And that's what teachers are supposed to do. And we're supposed to listen. When the Bible, and it's Paul who's talking, and when he tells us that we should be more mature, I think what he's talking about is that we should grow in the way that we understand God.

It says that we should travel on the road of faith, that we should not stay over here and spin around in circles, but that we should go on the way that Jesus tells us we should go.

[17 : 47] Maybe it's how we treat other people. Like when you're really little, you don't really know any better. You might be crawling or walking like a little kid, and you bump into another little kid and they fall down, but you didn't understand that that wasn't a good thing. And the Bible tells us that the way we grow in our faith is how we treat other people. Like maybe we used to treat them that way when we were a baby or a toddler, because we didn't understand. But now that we're a little bit older, then we can learn about how we talk to people and how we do what we can to do what we're supposed to do. Get in a line, put our masks on, things like that that we do because we're getting older. We're getting older. So one of the examples I have is

I have my magnet tiles here. I don't know if you've ever seen these. They're such fun toys. And maybe when we're little and we first get these toys, maybe all we do is stack them up in piles. And maybe they're not even the same height. Maybe they're all over the place. Maybe this one's big and this one's small and this one's smaller. But we're not really building anything. And it's kind of fun. But maybe what God wants us to do as we get older, as we learn more about what it means that Jesus loves me and then I love you, is that we learn to do things that are not just good. That we don't just stay here with our stacks of magnet tiles. That maybe we start to build something. I built something here, the bear's hiding behind it.

And I don't know if you can see this. Can you imagine what kind of building this might be before it falls down? Because it's going to fall down right this minute. Well, it was a church. And it fell down. But does that mean I can't build it again?

It's kind of like us. We fall down. Maybe we're learning to ride a bike. Maybe we're learning how to play soccer or wiffle ball or t-ball or something. Maybe we're learning how to dance. And we fall down.

What do we do? Do we stay like the church on my table? Well, I think part of what God wants us to try to do is get back up and build it again.

[20 : 55] Maybe this time it will be bigger. Maybe this time it will have doors. Did you notice there weren't any doors? Probably that's why it fell down. Who can get into a church that doesn't have any doors?

Imagine if your house didn't have any doors. You wouldn't be able to get in. Or your car. Just a big piece of metal. God teaches us to keep going. To not only get stronger and better at some of the things that we're doing like reading our Bibles or praying, but also to start doing things that make our world better. Did you know that you could do that? You can. You can pray for other people because sometimes they're sad or they're sick or they're worried about something. And instead of just praying for what I want, I can pray for somebody else who needs God's love and care. I can do things like imagine, what can I do for people who are hungry? When we're little, we're just worried about eating so we don't get hungry. But then as we get bigger, well, we can't drive to the grocery store or do anything like that.

Can't plant a garden all by ourselves. But maybe we can talk to our moms and our dads. What can we do to help the people that don't have any food? Is there a place we can give some food?

Or think about how people are so different from each other. We might have a yellow person and a red person and a blue person. I don't know what color you would want to be. I'd pick the blue. But does that mean that if I'm the blue and I see a red and a yellow people, I say, no, I'm going to go find my blue people.

I think part of us growing up in our faith and believing in God is saying, I think I want to be friends with people that are different from me. I think I want to see what can we be when we're together?

[23 : 23] How beautiful we can be when we're together. And you see two of them are squares and one of them is a big triangle. That's okay. Are you all the same? I'm sure not the same as everybody else. Not at all.

There are people who are so much taller. There are people who are boys and I'm not a boy. There are people whose skin is a different color than mine. We're not all the same.

God said, I think children, that's you, understand what this means. That if God loves us and then we're going to love everybody, then sometimes it means not just doing the same old thing all the time.

Not just wanting what we want, but sometimes it's figuring out how can I do something that's going to help the world be a better place? How can I do something that's going to help my neighborhood, my friends, or even my mom and dad? How can I help them make the world a better place?

What's the difference? Well, it's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of hard work being growing up and having to do more things like homework and jobs and chores that get harder as you get older sometimes. Sometimes we just want to be a kid. Even us grown-ups and that's okay because God wants us to play and laugh.

[25 : 08] So I'm glad that you're here with me and I hope this week maybe you'll talk to mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, your brother, your sister, someone. Maybe you'll talk to somebody about, wait, I'm bigger now. What can I do to make the world better?

What can I do? I'd like to pray for us and I hope you will pray for somebody that you know or somebody you don't know.

Let's pray. This is me. This is God. Nothing in between. God, sometimes we just want to be a little kid. We want to play and eat fun food and get new toys and run around outside.

And we know you want us to do all those things, God. But we also know that as we get bigger, we can make a difference. We can change the world. So help us one block at a time, one building at a time, one person, one prayer, one can of beans.

We can make a difference. Thank you for giving us our lives, Jesus. Amen. Amen. You have a great week. I look forward to seeing you again next week.

[26 : 37] I don't know whether I'm going to build my church or whether I'm going to shoot a bunch of balls, but I'll see you next week. Take care. We've come here expecting God to do amazing things right here, right now.

Great things happen when we come together. Great things happen when we praise our Savior.

We sing, we serve, we learn, we serve, we love, we learn. Break things are going to happen. Break things are going to happen here.

We come here expecting God to do amazing things right here, right now. Our friends and our family together Here to have some fun Right here, right now Great things happen when we come together Great things happen when we praise our Savior We sing, we serve, we laugh, we learn Great things happen when we come together Great things happen when we praise our Savior We sing, we serve, we laugh, we learn

Great things happen when we praise our Savior Great things happen when we praise our Savior Great things happen when we praise our Savior Good morning. As we go before the Lord this morning in prayer, we need to remember the family of June Smith.

[29 : 10] Jean passed away this week on Thursday, so the family is going through grief and sorrow, so we want to keep them in our prayers this morning.

And I'm sure there are many of you out there that have concerns on your heart also, so let's lift them up to the Lord this morning and take some time just to seek Him.

And I'm thinking of the hymn, I need the every hour. We do need the Lord every minute of the day. So let's go before Him this morning in prayer.

Holy God, we come to you with the concerns that are on our hearts. Lord, everyone has needs, Lord God, that need to be met by you.

And Lord, I pray for the Smith family as they're going through the loss of their dear loved one. Lord, I pray that you would give them the peace and the comfort and the strength that they need.

[30 : 13] Help them to have comfort by the many memories that they have, Lord God, and the hope that they have that you give us the grace that we need to be saved by the cross.

And Lord, I just pray that you would comfort them and comfort all who are going through the grief process right now, Lord God. There are many, Lord. And Lord, I just pray that you would be there, Lord, in the midst of their sorrow.

And Lord, that you would just give them the strength that they need. Lord, I pray for our hearts. Lord, that our hearts would be in your presence, Lord God.

Lord God, that our hearts would be able to seek you. Lord, I pray that you would prepare our hearts to hear your word this morning, that you would prepare us to worship you, that you would prepare us, Lord God, to put you first in everything that we do and say.

Lord, I pray that you would help us, Lord God, to become closer to you, to be the disciples that you would want us to be, Lord God, that we would make a difference in this world.

[31 : 23] Lord, even in the normal that we have right now, Lord, that it's all different. Lord, I pray that you would give us times, Lord God, where we can take time to share your testimony with others.

And Lord, I pray for those that are going through difficult times, Lord, that they're socially distant, Lord, and they're not seeing the family that they need to see. They're not seeing the friends that they need to see, Lord God.

Lord God, and Lord, I pray that during this time, Lord God, that they would take the opportunity to be closer with you. Help us all to take the opportunity to be closer with you.

I pray for those, Lord God, that are going through mental health situations. Lord, that you would be with them, Lord, that you would help them to be able to have their minds, Lord, focused on you.

And Lord, just speak to them. Speak to those that need your voice. Speak to them, Lord God. And as we take a moment right now, just to hear from you and just to lift our concerns to you, Lord, I pray that your presence would just fill us right where we are.

[32 : 51] Lord, we thank you for that friend that we have in Jesus. Lord, all our sins and griefs to bear. And what a privilege is to carry everything to you in prayer.

And Lord, it is a privilege and an honor to speak to you and to praise you and to worship you and to give you the needs that are on our heart.

It's an honor, Lord God, because you are our true answer to every prayer. And we thank you, Lord, that you are that true answer. And I pray, Lord God, that everyone that is hearing this prayer right now would feel the truth in their life.

They would feel, Lord God, that you have the authority to answer every prayer. And we thank you and we come to you with that authority that you've given us to speak this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who we worship and praise.

In Jesus name, we pray together. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

[34 : 22] Thank you.

Just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says,

Friends, would you pray with me? Almighty and gracious God, as we come to you now with our hearts open, we pray that you would move among us and plant a seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So we are talking about building today, the building. And so to help us enter into our conversation, I want to start by talking about the fact that I am not a native Buffalonian.

[37 : 15] Most of you know that. But one of the great things that happened when my wife and I first moved to Buffalo was we were lucky to get a really great apartment. We had certain things we wanted to make sure we found.

And it had been a pretty tough search. But at the end of the day, and this was literally the last place we were going to be able to see that day, we found the perfect place.

Had everything we wanted. But what made it special was the couple who owned the house. It was a flat. It was a split level house. And Dick and Maureen, the couple who owned the place, were wonderful.

They were great. They welcomed us. And they became kind of extended family to us when we first got here. Now, as great as that apartment was, with all of its wonderful features and even having Dick and Maureen working there, living there, that over time what I really came to appreciate about this place was the yard.

Because being pretty much a city kid, we didn't have too much yard when I grew up. But every day would go by. And I would hear, you know, if not every day, pretty much every other day, Dick whistling out back as he would tend to all the plants.

[38 : 32] There was this great driveway along the side because the garage was in the back. But there was a really nice space that he had created over to the right of the apartment.

And he would tend to it regularly. I'd always hear Maureen out front, you know, humming to herself as she would water the many baskets that she had. And it was beautiful.

Because I would walk to and from work and I would see other houses. And I would notice that not everybody's yard was in this kind of shape. So it was a beautiful thing to be able to come home to that kind of space.

It was fragrant. It was colorful. And it was a great place to just be able to be and relax. Now, as I said, one of the reasons why I came to appreciate that is I myself had never really done that kind of work before.

And gardening's never really just been my thing. So, to be able to have that kind of space turned into a really wonderful addition to my life.

[39 : 37] I didn't even appreciate it fully until Jen and I were able to buy our own place. Now, the people who owned the house had kept it well. But it didn't have the same kind of features.

It didn't have the same kind of garden that Dick and Maureen had created in their own space. And so that became kind of the challenge that we had to address. Because if we wanted a similar kind of environment, if we wanted to have that same kind of experience that we had enjoyed in the apartment, we were going to have to build it.

And that was going to be a bit of a trick. As I said, it really wasn't my thing. You know, my wife is much more the gardener than I am. But we knew that we could take care of this place.

We could maintain it. But were we going to invest the time, the energy, the attention it was going to take to create the kind of space that we had just enjoyed so well?

I offer that because that's kind of the challenge that we find in our scripture lesson this morning. Because we need to think about what it means to be able to grow and to build as a disciple.

[40 : 54] And when you think about what we're dealing with, our commitment to being part of the body of Christ offers the opportunity to help build up the body, not simply maintain it.

To build up the body for God's glory. And a question we all have to ask ourselves, even during these exceptional times, is the degree to which we are striving to build or whether we are just seeking to maintain.

Whether we are striving to maintain. So let's spend a little time in the passage. Because there are three pieces here that I really want to bring out that will help us understand the challenge that we are facing from Paul.

So in Ephesians, one of the things that we get is that Paul does what he seems to have this theme that he does in his books. He will lay out a pretty nice doctrinal argument.

He will lay out some of the theology or the side of what it means to be a disciple. And then he offers really practical advice about, so this is how you should go live if you believe these things.

[42 : 08] And chapter 4 of Ephesians is where he makes that pivot in this book. Right? And because you can always tell when somebody starts with a therefore, that's kind of where we're at.

And verse 1 gives us a therefore. And he says, Therefore, as a prisoner of the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you have received from God.

Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love. And make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together.

You are one body and one Spirit. Just as God called you in one hope.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And one God and Father of all who is over all, through all, and in all. I want to stop there for a minute because that section where he talks about one God, one Father, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, is important for us to remember as we walk.

[43 : 25] Now, when we say we are building, one of the things is what are we building toward, or what are we building in the name of, or what are we building from? It's key for us to remember that as we look around and see so many different people, we recognize that we bring different experiences.

We understand that we bring different perspectives. We are a diverse people. But even in our diversity, we know that there is a unity.

And that unity springs from that core set of things that bring us together. Because even though our roads may be different, the God that has led us is the same.

Even though we may have experienced different things in life, the one who has carried us through them is the same. And so in that diversity, there is very strong unity, that one that holds us together.

And when we think about that one faith, that one baptism, that one Lord, that even though we can disagree around the edges, that center from which we all spring makes us one.

[44 : 43] We hear more about that diversity if we go a little further into the passage. And these three verses are the meat of what we want to talk about today. And these are verses 11, 12, and 13.

He, meaning Christ, he gave some to be apostles, some prophets and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ. Until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son.

God's goal for us is to become mature adults, to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. So, you hear in verse 11, Paul talking about the diversity of gifts.

We hinted at diversity of experiences, but remember that we have diversity of gifts. And that's a beautiful thing. Because we know that we can't do this by ourselves.

[45 : 52] While we are one people, while we are one church, while we are one body, each of us makes a contribution that is unique and that the rest of us need.

And so those gifts matter. When you think about your walk, when you think about the peace you bring, it's going to do something that no one else is going to do.

And so we need you. I need you. I need every single one of us to be at my best, and so that my gift does what God intends it to do.

That's the way it works. I wish I could attribute this quote to its original author, but I heard it spoken in a sermon a few years ago. The quote goes like this.

God made us that we would know God and God's love. God made us diverse so that we would know each other. God made us so that we would know God and God's love.

[46 : 57] God made us diverse so that we would know each other. You see, if we didn't realize that there are those who can sing in a way that blesses us in a way that I couldn't possibly do.

If there are those who can organize in a way that makes us work more efficiently in ways that I couldn't possibly do. If there are those who can work with their hands and fix things in ways that I can't possibly do.

Then, I have to connect. I have to bring my gift, though. Their gift blesses me. My gift blesses them. And that's how we grow together.

That's how things are made whole. That's the expectation God brings for us. It's a beautiful thing when you can get all of that together and it functions at its best.

And that's what we are striving for. That's the expectation and that's the hope God brings. So now, what does all this have to do with a garden and building?

[48 : 10] When I hear Paul talking about this idea, it reminds me of the importance of bringing my gift.

And when we think about who we are as disciples, when we think about the ways we come to our faith walk, it's very important for us to remember, are we simply maintaining?

Or are we striving to build? See, it's very easy for us to fall into a place where maintaining is what we do. We get used to a routine.

We fall into a very comfortable place. Worship is at this time and I sit in my favorite seat. I do Bible study with this group of people and it's wonderful and it's a blessing and it does, it makes me comfortable.

It feels good. I may hear something new. But hearing new information isn't exactly the same as striving to build. And it's a wonderful thing to be in that place.

[49 : 17] But when we start to get too comfortable, when we stop seeking, what is God calling me to next? What might be over the horizon?

How might we take what God has given us and not simply keep it neat and keep it comfortable, but actually create something extraordinary?

What is God calling us to become? That's where the challenge comes to us. So we have to ask ourselves, do we have a maintaining mindset or do we have an actual building mindset?

You see, a maintaining mindset would be one that walked into a yard. One that saw that it had been well kept and one that said, okay, we can stay here.

Meaning, we will make sure that it stays watered. We will make sure that the edges are trimmed. We will make sure that it looks green and it's neat and it's not really a problem on the rest of the block.

[50 : 26] That's maintaining. Or can we envision? Can we hear? Can we feel a pull of the spirit that says, I got something greater for you?

There's more that's possible. And what if? What if? What if? How might we? Could we try?

That voice comes to you in so many different ways. But are we in a place where we're just going to say, I'm comfortable here. I'm good.

Or am I going to try to build something beautiful? As we respond to that call, we know that God is always leading us to that.

Because one of the hard questions we'd have to ask ourselves would be, are we looking for that? Are we thinking?

[51 : 31] Are we listening to where God is leading? Because what if we found ourselves in a place where we said, okay, so I've done these things and so this must be all God has for me.

That sounds almost strange to think, doesn't it? That the God who created all things from the tiniest bloom on a flower to the largest star in the universe, the one who has numbered the very hairs on your head, that as you get up and go through every day to think that this is all he's got for me, that there's no more to my adventure.

We know that God continues to draw us out. God continues to take us new places. And so with that, this challenge about maintaining versus building comes not only for us as individuals, but it also calls on us as a congregation.

Do we see this idea of a body that is building up? Do we see the possibilities? Do we see the opportunities? Do we see broken and hurting and sinful people around us?

Do we see people in need? Where are the hungry? Where are the hurting? Where are the lost? So not only do we bring our individual gifts and do we strive to go where Jesus is leading us as individual disciples, but when the collective of individual disciples gets together, how does the body move forward?

[53 : 21] Paul talks about that challenge when we get to the end of the chapter. we left off at 13, let's hear from 14 to 16. As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and tricks of people that play to deliberately mislead others.

Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let us grow every way into Christ who is the head. The whole body grows from him and is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments.

The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does their part.

Think of the possibility. Think of what Christ is leading us to. there's beauty out there. There is a glory out there.

There is a blessing out there that Christ is calling us to be a part of. And so as we do our part, we can build something amazing.

[54 : 40] Now, when we get to this place, we may say, well, how am I supposed to do that? You heard me say gardening isn't my thing. That's why I was so impressed when I saw Sherry's message last week because it's just not what I do.

But for her to be able to produce that was pretty incredible. And that's an example of what happens when you bring a build mindset. Because when you see what Dick and Maureen were able to do with their space, what Sherry was able to do with her garden, there's three things that stand out in our faith that each of us can do.

To do that bring, you have to invest time. time. Now we all say, but I don't have time. Each of us has time. Each of us has exactly the same amount of time.

But we make choices about our time. And the thing is, if gardening is your thing, but for me it might be something like cooking dinner, or it might be playing a sport.

But the thing is, when it's a valued activity, when it's something that feeds you, when it's something that brings you joy, you will say, certain minutes of my day will get this. And the challenge we all face is, do we put Jesus on that list?

[55 : 55] What's our choice about the minutes of the day we spend with him? It also takes focus. That when you are preparing that dinner, when you are reading that garden, when you are working on your file shot, whatever it is that is that valued thing, you are paying attention to it.

It gets the best of your brain. If there are 19 things happening around you, it's very difficult for you to give it its very best. And lastly, it takes energy.

You are willing to put some sweat equity into the result. And you just have to do that. These things do not happen on their own.

church, our challenge is how are we investing time, focus, and energy in building our own relationship with Christ?

How are we investing time, energy, and focus into building the body if we are going to go into the opportunity before us?

[57 : 13] If we would see the future with hope that God has promised us, he has set the path before us. But to go into that future with hope, we have to be ready to respond.

We have to be able to allot what it is necessary to live into that future. future. So we have to move past maintaining.

The thing about maintaining is that it'll be great for a while, and it will always look good. But the something greater, the future with hope, the possibility, the opportunity, for something truly exceptional.

Because we serve an exceptional God, is there. Will we come to that ready?

Do we come to that in expectation? Because that is how we build beautiful things. Amen?

[58 : 29] Amen. in the pond there is a flower, in the sea an apple tree, in the coons of incommies, water flies will sing me free.

In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be unrevealed until it ceases something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, singing word and melody. There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.

from the past to the future, but it holds our history, unrevealed until it ceases something God alone can see.

in our end is our beginning, in our time and liberty, in our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity, in our death, the resurrection, and the last, the victory, are revealed until it sees something God alone can see.

[60 : 43] do out Beautiful Lord, wonderful Savior, I know for sure All of my days are held in your hand Crafted into your perfect plan You gently call me into your presence Guiding me by your Holy Spirit Teach me, dear Lord, to live all my life

Through your eyes I'm captured by your holy calling Send me above I know you're drawing me to yourself Leave me, Lord, I pray Take me, hold me, use me, fill me I'll give my life to the Father's hand Call me, guide me, lead me Walk beside me I yield my life to the Father's hand

You gently call me into your presence Guiding me by your Holy Spirit Teach me, dear Lord, to live all my life Through your eyes I'll have you by your Holy calling Set me, set me up by I know you're drawing me to your shell Lead me, Lord, I pray Lead me, Lord, I pray Take me, hold me, use me, fill me I'll give my life to the Father's hand

Oh, lead me, guide me Lead me, walk beside me I'll give my life to the Father's hand So friends, as we think about Our walk with God this week I want you to consider doing something That may help you move more Into thinking about building And the idea would be to capture In some sort of way Whether you just do it mentally You might even want to journal it But think about the number of minutes You spend purposefully working on your faith In a given day Think about how much is happening around you

Are you able to give it focus? And are you able to put energy to it? Are you doing certain things? Are you doing acts of generosity?

[65 : 12] Acts of kindness? What are the ways in which you are showing God's love to the world? Capture it in some way Not in a way to be overly harsh or self-critical But one thing about knowing whether you are growing Is you have to know from where you start And so if you can think about Maybe there are some ways I could offer more time Deeper focus Or perhaps even commit to doing one act of kindness a day Perhaps then we will see a new build emerge in your life And more beauty will emerge As we were talking about So now as we come to a time of prayer of confession I would ask you to open your heart with me And let's pray together Gracious and loving God Even though our love is great We know we are limited Even though we strive and we struggle

We know we sometimes fail Lord Jesus we are amazed by your grace That you come to us in our weakness That you still comfort us Even when we fall short That you forgive us When we know And even when we don't know That we have done wrong In your eyes God in your grace You have given us something special to offer to the world You have created a space That is designed uniquely and only for us You have given us that seed And sometimes we hold that seed But don't plant it Sometimes we plant it But don't nurture it Lord For the ways in which We have not done your will

For the ways in which We have ignored your voice For the ways in which We have chosen our own path Instead of your own We seek your forgiveness Hear now our prayer of confession As we offer it silently From our own heart Friends hear the good news God has shown us his love for us In the life In the death And in the resurrection Of our Lord Jesus the Christ And in the name of Jesus Christ You are forgiven Glory to God Amen Friends would you join me

In offering the prayer That Jesus taught us to pray Our Father Who art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us And lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom And the power And the glory forever Amen Thank you for being with us I'm Kathy Hall Stengel The senior pastor Of Niagara Falls First And Pendleton Center United Methodist Churches I'm Scott Johnson Associate pastor Of Niagara Falls First And Pendleton Center United Methodist Churches Specializing in adult discipleship I am Sherry Mehar Associate pastor Of Niagara Falls First And Pendleton Center United Methodist Churches Specializing in discipleship

Worship And caregiving The three of us Have gathered Here in this space To share a pastoral statement As our congregations Continue to find our way In reclaiming space And ministry We also want to support The very difficult work Of the reopening advisory teams From both of our congregations Whether it's here With people you know Or across the state And maybe the country Advisory teams Are working harder Than they ever imagined In determining the right path For congregations Not just any congregations The ones they deeply love During a time of pandemic During unrest Across our land And confronted with great anxiety And many strong feelings And thoughts The primary subject Of all of these meetings Is the safety Well-being And spiritual care

[70 : 18] Of each of you And your families The past eight months Have brought great changes Stress and distress To Niagara Falls First And Pendleton Center United Methodist Churches You were saying goodbye To Pastor Tom And he might have been The only pastor You've known At Pendleton Center And has been At Niagara Falls First The senior pastor You were also saying goodbye To Pastor Lisa The pastor coordinating prayer And adult discipleship Goodbyes were being planned Farewell And retirement parties And then the unimaginable happened The pandemic spread Of the COVID-19 virus This pandemic Separated both congregations From their buildings From shared worship experiences From in-person sharing In the sacrament of communion And that's just the worship part

We can't fully know How this has impacted you Or how COVID-19 Has otherwise impacted your life Job, ability to travel Having graduation parties Weddings or even funerals It's been a cruel virus Some of you have experienced Or witnessed Some of your neighbors Or friends or family Who have become sick Or even died The bottom line with this pandemic Is that there is just so much We know And so much we don't know We will never know perfectly How to protect ourselves Let alone our families Our children Our elderly parents Or special needs children And adults School opening And educational opportunities Available and unavailable Have created stress We know that some of you Have largely resumed your lives Being out in the world

Working Shopping Eating Restaurants And traveling Some of you are tiptoeing out Slowly And very carefully We also know that some Are just not there yet We know That we don't all believe The same things As it pertains to the origin Or spread Of this virus We As your pastoral leaders Have become increasingly aware That feelings are escalating Escalating Around the subject Of having in-person worship At both of our churches We hear the fear And we hear the anger And frustration Some of you are saying That you are doing well Where you are And need to stay safely home Some of you are saying That you're willing to come back At a limited level And others Are urging us To get the building open And resume in-person worship And in-person ministries As soon as possible Or even yesterday

As the spiritual leaders Of this congregation We would like to convey to you Every single one of you How valued you are And how valued your thoughts And feelings are It is challenging enough To begin to meet All the needs and wants We are hearing It is actually impossible To please everyone Or provide for every need The complexity of creating A sense of safety In these buildings And for these gathered Is so much more Than it might seem The decision to begin To provide in-person worship Or any other kind of ministry In our buildings Likely involves hundreds Yes, hundreds of details Supplies, coordination And volunteers Inside our offices here The area, the conversations The decisions Every one of them Has an element Of working with the complexities That we are facing

There isn't always agreement On everything Even among these hardworking teams But it's not because Anyone is being difficult It's because we care that much And all of this knowing Definitely That what we will offer Will be different From anything The three of us Or any of us Have experienced before In the context of worship There has been And is a clamoring of voices That we hear Because it's taking so long To get our buildings open We hear you We get it We do And we are sorry For the losses That so many Have already experienced And how further separation From your church families From our church family Is affecting you And us And our households We hear the questions We hear them

[75 : 21] Why? Why haven't we opened? Who's responsible For making these decisions? We do hear you We all do hear you You've probably heard the phrase Teamwork makes the dream work Well Doing ministry this way Has never been a dream Or something that we could have imagined Hear me The decision to open these doors Is not And could never be responsibly A solo act As the identified lead I depend on this team of pastors Standing here And I depend on the teams Established long before my arrival To help make these decisions I pray for And count On the three of us And all the teams That serve you To work To be of one body And one spirit It is not easy

And you know well It is not perfect Listening Patience Kindness Grace Grace Grace Grace Grace Grace Grace My hope is In all of that That we can unite In a common purpose Hear these words from Ephesians 4.

With the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit. Just as God also called you in one hope.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And one God and Father of all. Who is over all, through all, and in all.

If ever there might be a time when our congregations are called upon by God and through scripture to stand together, it's now.

[78 : 04] Paul wrote from prison pleading with the Christian believers to demonstrate patience, grace, and tolerance. He asked them to turn and look and recognize each and every one as brother and sister.

All gifted. All differently gifted. But part of one body and one spirit. In the next part of Ephesians 4, Paul identifies some of the gifts given to each and all.

Among us, we represent every spiritual gift imaginable. In our pain, in our anxiety and fear, in our words against and for, in our patience and impatience, we see the gifts of many being clouded in the chaos as so many seek a different path to the same goal.

In our looking around at what other churches are doing, we sometimes feel resentment and discouragement, even anger or impatience.

There are sometimes feelings that are so noisy, it's hard to hear the call of God on our lives and on our congregations. They are understandably strong.

[79 : 27] Strong feelings that show up often when we don't feel we have much control. Paul asked us to make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties us together.

Never have I ever wanted to begin my ministry here this way. And never have I ever been more grateful for the nurses, the business people, the engineers, the people who know these buildings and know these congregations, the staff who have helped to guide us through these painstaking steps.

Paul reminds us that we are one body and one spirit. I ask you, I pray that you, that we might pause, and that we might consider that we are all about the same goal, to safely gather in worship and figure out how we can provide opportunities for ministry in our own buildings.

I assure you, no one wants that more than those who stand here and the advisory teams and all the volunteers who are coming forward.

Our agenda is you and being good stewards of all that is given us, congregations and resources. Our agenda is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in whatever ways and wherever possible.

[81 : 07] Our agenda is caring for the least, the lost, the suffering, the separated, the orphan, the widows, and the strangers. So many of you have wonderfully offered yourselves in service to getting ourselves together in worship.

Many of you have already committed yourselves to following all the safety guidelines, no matter how uncomfortable or restrictive they might be.

May the many, when it comes to following the guidelines, be all of us for the good of all. You may not agree with safety guidelines or restrictions, and that's okay.

But we ask that when you are here, that we all follow them so that we might be gathered together in one body and follow them for the person standing or sitting near you, the person you've never met.

Follow them. Let's all try our best to follow them for the good of the whole body. We are looking to be united in the place we are in.

[82 : 20] Right now, we are in a not-yet place. We are not in a never place. Being together again will be a first step and not a final step.

We just need a starting place. And I invite you, I invite you to join us all on the starting line.

Toes on the line. Everyone joined in hope and grace, united in the peace of Jesus Christ. When the doors open, it will be a homecoming.

And oh, how I want to be at home with all of you, whether we are virtually together or in person. We all want that. Let us turn our faces together, one body, one spirit, towards the unity taught, the grace given from God, made real in Jesus Christ.

And let us turn to one another and offer that same grace. I am the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry, All who dwell in darkness in my hand will sing.

[83 : 58] I who wave the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send? Here I am, Lord.

Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord. I have heard you, only in my mind.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I am a Lord of snow and grain. I have borne my people's name. I have blessed for love on earth.

[85 : 12] Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord. I will break their hearts of stone. Give them hearts for love on earth.

I will speak my words to them. whom shall I stay. whom shall I stay. Here I am, Lord.

Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord. Here I am, Lord.

Here I am, Lord. I am oneliga.

You lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

[86 : 18] Now the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame. I will serve a feast for them.

My hand will sing. Mind is bread I will provide. Till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give my life to them. Who shall I stand? Here I am, Lord.

Here I am, Lord. I have heard you calling in the night.

I will know, Lord. If you need me, I will hold your people in my heart.

[87 : 39] Amen. So friends, as you go into the week, know that there is so much that is possible. Let God's Spirit reach inside.

Inspire you to keep building. Inspire you to keep growing. Inspire you to keep moving forward. And so let's pray together. Now in the name of God, our creator and king.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior. And in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer. May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen. Amen. Amen.