Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ: Community

November 1, 2026

Sermon Summary by Rev. Jonathan Murray

In this week's message on Community, Rev. Jonathan Murray reminded the congregation that the Christian life is never intended to be lived alone. Faith grows through relationships, love is practiced among people, and spiritual growth happens within a community shaped by Christ's love. Drawing from John 15, Jesus' final instructions to His disciples center on one simple yet profound command: “Love one another as I have loved you."

At the heart of the sermon is Jesus' invitation to “abide" in His love. The Greek word meno means to remain, dwell, or make one's home in a relationship. Jesus invites His followers to make their home in God's love and to allow that love to become the foundation from which they live. Importantly, this love is not earned. Christ loves us first, just as God loved Him first. Community begins with grace, not achievement.

Rev. Murray emphasized that Christian love is more than emotion. The New Testament word agape describes a love expressed through action, commitment, generosity, and sacrifice. Most often, this love is seen not in heroic acts but in ordinary faithfulness: listening when someone needs to be heard, offering encouragement, bringing a meal, forgiving a hurt, or simply remaining present during difficult times. These everyday acts are how Christian community is formed and sustained.

Because the sermon was delivered on All Saints Day, the message reflected on those who have shaped our faith journeys. Many people continue to influence us long after they are gone. Their kindness, wisdom, faithfulness, and examples become part of who we are. We carry their legacy forward through the ways we treat others and live out our faith. Saints are not remembered because they were perfect, but because God's grace became visible through their ordinary lives.

Turning to Ephesians, the sermon highlighted that Christian community is built on unity rather than uniformity. The church is one body with many members, gifts, experiences, and perspectives. Just as a hand requires different fingers to function, the church requires different people and gifts working together. Some teach, some organize, some pray, some serve quietly, and some excel at welcoming others. Every gift contributes to building up the body of Christ.

The sermon also challenged the congregation to remember that community is not something confined within church walls. The purpose of Christian fellowship is to prepare believers to carry Christ's love into homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and the

broader community. As an example, Rev. Murray pointed to FPCL's community assistance ministry, where volunteers provide food, transportation assistance, and hospitality to those in need. Through these acts of service, Christ's love is shared with people who may never know the names of those who helped them.

The message concluded with a powerful image of the Dead Sea. Water continually flows into it, but because nothing flows out, it cannot sustain life. Likewise, God's love is meant to be shared. A faith that only receives eventually becomes stagnant, while a faith that shares love becomes life-giving. Christian community flourishes when people receive Christ's love and then offer that same love to others.

Key Takeaway:
A life rooted in Christ is cultivated through community. We abide in Christ's love, grow together through grace and service, honor those who have shaped our faith, and become channels through which God's love flows into the world. The love we have received is the love we are called to share.

Transcript

As you're able, please remain standing for the reading of the gospel as it comes from John chapter 15, beginning at verse 9.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment. that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing. But I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. I'm giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

This is the word of the Lord. God is still speaking.

Please be seated. There are certain people who never really leave us. You may have not thought about that person for weeks, months, or even years. And then you hear a familiar hymn. or you find an old photograph. You face a difficult decision, and right then, there they are. You remember what that person would have said, and they're not physically present, of course, and yet somehow they are with you. Their kindness has become part of the way you treat other people. Their faith helped shape your own. Their example gives you courage. Their words continue to lead. We carry people with us. And All Saints Day, we remember that this is one of the remarkable gifts of community. That relationship we form in Christ does not simply end because someone is no longer physically with us. As we continue our sermon series, Cultivate a Life in Christ, we consider the role of community in our spiritual growth. Because we've talked about commitments, we've talked about financial wisdom, we've talked about priorities and rhythm and the other list of items, we remember that none of those things happen in isolation. Faith grows in a relationship. Love is practiced among people. Our gifts become meaningful ways when they are shared. In John 15, Jesus speaks to the disciples. This is part of His discourse as He prepares them for His leaving. So he tells them, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. Now that word abide is central to this whole passage. The Greek word is minno, meaning to remain or stay or to continue dwelling in a place, but it's especially emphasized when we're talking about staying, remaining within a relationship. Jesus is inviting the disciples to make their home in the love shared in that community. Stay here, remain here. Let this love become the place from which you live. But you have to pay attention to the order of Jesus' words because he

doesn't say, prove to me that you're worth loving. He says, as the Father has loved me, so I love you. Love, like grace, comes first. We begin with the love that Christ has already extended to us. We don't earn our place in Christ's community by being perfect, or none of us would be here. We don't earn our place by having all of the right answers or agreeing with everyone. Christ's community is that environment in which we can grow even within our differences. And Jesus says, this is my commandment. which I find really interesting. This is the only time that Jesus issues a command. Well, command meant that you love one another as I have loved you. That Greek word here for love is agape. We talked about it a little bit last week, but this is the love that seeks the good of the other person, even when it costs us something. It's not simply a feeling. It's not the love that I would say that a couple has as they first get together. It's not this feeling, emotional love. It's the love that is expressed through commitment, through generosity, and most importantly through action. God's love comes first because love is an action that defines the connection that God has toward humanity, toward creation. And Jesus makes this love concrete. He speaks of laying down one's life for one's friends. which, by the way, does not mean every act of love has to be some act of heroic measure. More often, it looks like constant faithfulness, ordinary faithfulness, listening when someone needs to talk, making room for someone who feels overlooked, bringing that meal to someone who needs just the company, offering a ride, forgiving a hurt, or staying present when there is no easy answer. This is how community is formed. Not through our ability to get along perfectly, but through the love of Christ that calls us to love one another. It's this kind of love that we remember today when we think of those saints who have helped shape our lives. Imagine a child sitting beside a grandparent in a church pew. The child is restless. The sermon is always too long. The hymns are unfamiliar, especially these days when we play on the organ. We don't hear that instrument very often. But the grandparent sings. Grandparent knows when to stand and when to sit, knows when to bow their head to join in prayer, and then places a gentle hand on the shoulder of the grandchild as they whisper the Lord's Prayer as the congregation says it together. Years later, that child, that grown child now finds themselves in a different church setting in another congregation, singing a hymn that they haven't heard in years. And suddenly the grandparent is there, not physically beside them, but present in the memory, in the music, in the faith that was quietly planted all those years ago. The child has carried the grandparent into the future the grandparent would never see. In many ways, That's our story. We receive things from other people that we may not fully understand at the time. Faith, patience, courage, questions, acts of love. These things become part of us and we carry them into the relationships and places that they will never know. This is especially meaningful today on All Saints Day, when we remember those who have touched our lives, shaped our lives, shaped our faithfulness. Who is someone you remember? Parent, sister, grandfather, husband, best friend. What about the stranger that showed up in that moment

when you really needed somebody and you never even got their name? Or if you did, you were overwhelmed in the moment but they were present with you to help. All of these things. We may not remember those people, these saints, because they were flawless. We know they weren't. Saints are not people who never made mistakes. Saints are people through whom God's grace becomes visible in those ordinary circumstances of life. We remember their laughter, their generosity, their stubborn hope, their service, their willingness to keep going even when life was hard. And so we ask ourselves, what have we received from them that we are now called to share with others? The love we receive becomes the love that we share. The faith that sustains us becomes that witness to someone else. The kindness shown to us becomes that kindness that we extend. The people who have shaped our faith become part of the faith we carry into the world. That letter to Ephesians offers another picture of community. The letter calls Christians to live with humility and gentleness and patience and love, making every effort to maintain the unity in the spirit. It reminds us that there is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. That is what holds this community together. Not some shared personality, not identical opinions. It's the God who has called us into relationship that holds the community together. Ephesians uses this Greek word henotes, meaning unity or oneness. And let's be clear, unity is not the same as uniformity. I know you know that, but it's always a good reminder. Unity is not calling us to be exactly the same. From the children's sermon, five fingers are not the same, but they are part of 1 hand. A community can be united without everyone being the same. And that is what the author of Ephesians is calling the church to be, to use their gifts, their experiences, their questions, their perspectives for the good of all. Ephesians goes on to describe the different gifts given to the church. These gifts help equip God's people for ministry and the building up of the church. The work of building up that body of Christ takes all of us. Some people teach, some people organize. Some people offer practical help. Some welcome strangers. There are a couple of people here, and I'm not going to name your names, but I would just about swear the way you can welcome somebody, you could get a brick wall to talk back to you. have that gift. And it's a beautiful gift that not everyone has. And it's essential. Some of you pray faithfully. Some of you quietly show up every time. We need the whole body. We need one another, not because we are incapable of having faith on our own, but because faith is not meant, or faith is meant to become something larger than what we are on our own. This is what community looks like when it's lived in Christ. A relationship in which we empower one another to become more fully the people God has created us to be. But here's the really good news. Community does not stay in one place. We gather here on Sunday mornings to worship, study scripture, pray, sing, share meals, and those things matter. But the purpose of Christian community is not to stay here, to make this space comfortable for those who already are here. Jesus sends the disciples into the world to bear fruit, just as

Jesus sends us into the world to cultivate that love that we have received within our homes, within our workplaces, within school settings and neighborhoods and civic life, and maybe especially into the lives of people who will never enter this building. See, I know the generosity that you have. I know the way that you are working to constantly shape FPCL as a community in Christ. If nothing else, I could go down a long list and most of those you already know, but pick out Thursdays when we are offering that community assistance to anybody who comes to the door. They have no idea who you are. They have no idea who packed the food bags. They have no idea who provided the bus passes. Just as you may never know their name or their life, there is that passing on. And it may be the difference of getting them through a week, feeding them for one meal. It may be just as simple as what they receive in that moment, but it's from your generosity, the giving of your gifts of time, money, and service, especially if you're one of those people that are at the door welcoming them with that smile. That's how Christ's love moves through a community. We receive it and we share it as we practice it. All Saints Day, we stand in this remarkable place between memory and possibility. We look back with gratitude for those whose lives have shaped ours. We acknowledge the grief of their absence. We give thanks for the ways that they have shaped us, how their love continues to live within us. And we see the people who are part of our lives today, the people who are around you, those who are up in the balcony, those who are here, those who are in the choir. You look around and you notice or you see opportunities to encourage someone when they need it. The people whose gifts maybe we haven't discovered yet. People who need us to listen more carefully, forgive more generously, or simply make a little bit more room. And you do. but we also look forward to the people who will come after us. The children learning what faith looks like, the new people searching for a community in faith to belong, neighbors who have not yet discovered just how much you show Christ's love. But what will they carry with them because they encountered you? Will they remember a community that practiced patience and listened with humility? Will they remember a church willing to share its gifts for the good of the wider community? Will they remember people who spoke about the love of Jesus or who helped them experience the love of Jesus? We may never know the answer to those questions, but day after day, because we have received the love that Christ gives, we have that love to share. One of my favorite examples of this is the Dead Sea. I got your attention. Water flows in. Water doesn't flow out. Nothing can live there. It's only when it has a way to share it that it becomes life giving. The love that you have received is the love that we are to share. Perhaps it will be a child who experienced your kindness, or a neighbor who felt noticed, a friend who found hope because you stayed, a stranger who discovered that there was room for them. That's what it means to cultivate a life in Christ. We abide in love, we grow together, we bear fruit in the world. So may we receive that legacy with gratitude. May we practice that love with courage, and may those who come

find the community that we are seeking to cultivate a little bit more grace, hope and welcome in Christ. Amen.