

If you would like to skip the sermon today and head off to coffee; you certainly can do that, because I am not going to tell you anything you do not know already. I am literally preaching to the choir. Also, Dewey did not set me up to follow his Stewardship plea of last week and Steve Hatt and I did know what the other was going to say today.

Recently Jan's mom passed away at the age of 93. She had a good life, a wonderful husband for over 50 years, two bright and kind daughters, three talented grandchildren, four cute great children, and two brilliant son-in-laws. Her recent passing gave the chance for the family to gather together to celebrate her life. The morning of the service the family gathered in the hotel's restaurant for breakfast. After a while we became concerned that we would be asked to leave the restaurant because we being were too loud and boisterous. This was not disrespectful toward Jan's mom, but rather a series of wonderful remembrances of past family trips, funny stories, holiday celebrations, and touching moments. This experience got me to begin to think even more about family.

Last week, Nancy spoke about this Church being part of her family, Linda related a joy of telling family stories, and the induction of a new member included references to family. Jan and I are celebrating being members of this family for 40 years this month. Our daughter Sarah maintained her connection to this Church even while living 600 miles away, Lois has been Sarah's third grandmother, I belong to the Wiscasset Fire Society and the majority of the members had relatives from the past who had belonged to the Society. As many of you might know, Roger has joined my school's staff as our music teacher. I asked him if anything struck him about my school. We serve a very, very needy population over in Lewiston and yet we have been successful as a school. He said what struck him was the sense of family in our school.

It is a widely held belief that humans crave a sense of belonging, a longing to believe that someone cares. It is said that gangs are a haven for disconnected youth for that reason. News reports suggest that that is how ISIS recruits young people, especially young men.

Hebrews 10: 24-25 says

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

In the present climate of our country and world where is there a better place to be than in this Church. We must set an example, be a beacon of what is right and just. We may not all see issues the same way, but I do not think we are far apart. We must continue to do good work such as Summerfest and opening our Church to the community for the Tree Lighting. We have been without a permanent pastor for many months and attendance is alarming at times. To help this situation, the Search Committee has worked many, many hours to complete its work. Stick by them.

Psalm 133 1 tells us that God is pleased when his people show unity. This Church as shown the capacity to weather difficult times throughout its long history. They have done it by sticking together and caring about each other as relatives.

Timothy 5:8 states that, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

We must unite behind this Church's leaders, care about each other, find the resources of time, talent, and wealth to continue the good and important work of this Church. In our present society it is difficult to attract people to our cause, but we must all do our part.

As you have heard me say before Robert Fulgram's book Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten is my favorite book.

In the early dark of an October's Saturday evening, the neighborhood children are playing hide and seek. How long since I played hide and seek? Thirty years; maybe more. I remember how. I could become part of the game in a moment, if invited. Adults don't play hide and seek. Not for fun, anyway. Too bad.

Did you have a kid in your neighborhood who always hid so good, nobody could find him? We did. After a while we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up, all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad back because he wasn't playing the game the way it was suppose to be played. There's hiding and there's finding we'd say. And he'd say it was hide and seek, not hide and give up, and we'd all yell about who made the rules and who cared about who, anyway, and how we wouldn't play with him anymore if he didn't get it straight and who needed him anyhow, and things like that. Hide and seek and yell. No matter what, thought, the next time he would hide too good again. He's probably still hidden somewhere, for all I know.

A man I know found out last year he had terminal cancer. He was a doctor. And knew about dying, and he didn't want to make his family and friends suffer through that with him. So he kept it a secret. And died. Everybody said how brave he was to bear his suffering in silence and not tell everybody, and so on and so forth. But, privately his family and friends how angry they were that he didn't need them, didn't trust their strength. And it hurt that he didn't say good-bye. He hid too well. Getting found would have kept him in the game. Hide and seek, grown-up style. Wanting to hide. Needing to be sought. Confused about being found. "I don't want anyone to know." "What will people think?" "I don't want to bother anyone."

Better than hide and seek, I like the game called Sardines. In Sardines the person who is It goes and hides, and everyone goes looking for him. When you find him, you get in with him and hide there with him. Pretty soon everybody is hiding together, all stacked in a small space like puppies in a pile. And pretty soon someone giggles and somebody laughs and everyone gets found.

Medieval theologians even describe God in hide and seek terms, calling him *Deus Absconditus*. But me, I think old God is a Sardine player. And will be found the same way everybody gets found in Sardines – by the sound of laughter of those heaped together at the end.

“Olly-olly-oxen-free.” The kids in the street are hollering the cry that says “Come on in, wherever you are. It’s a new game.” And so say I. To all those who have hid too good. *Get found, kid!* Olly-olly-oxen free.

We are fortunate that many years ago our predecessors left us this wonderful building and a base of resources to continue. We must not let this slip away. We are the building on the Common – we are the Church on the Hill.

Let us pray:

Dear God,

Give us the strength to make the right decisions to keep your House on the Hill strong, and give us the wisdom to play fewer games of hid and seek and more games of Sardines. Amen