

Spirit-Led Living

Romans 12: 9-21

Pastor Beth Dickerson

August 28, 2011

I am delighted to be with all of you this morning. Although this is my first official day on-board, I have been hanging around the church a bit for the last two weeks and I want to thank you for the warm welcome that I have received. The Council told me when I interviewed with them that you are a strong church filled with delightful, hard-working people and I'm definitely finding that to be true. I am very much looking forward to meeting more of you and talking about your dreams and vision for St. Peter's Church.

I want to share with you a little bit about myself. I am a Chicago-area native. I've lived here all my life except for the four years I was at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. My husband Paul and I live in Hinsdale and have three grown children and one granddaughter, Evie, who is the love of our lives.

I'm a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary which is in Hyde Park on the University of Chicago campus. I'm an ordained UCC minister with additional training from the Interim Ministry Network and the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. I have served Progressive Community Church in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago and Galewood Community Church which is just north of Oak Park in Chicago. I've been part of the adjunct clergy staff at the Union Church of Hinsdale, which is my home church, and I've been a chaplain at Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove.

What I enjoy most about the ministry is watching God's love transform people's lives. Too many people in this world, and likely some people even in this church, feel inadequate, damaged, unworthy, worthless, shameful, and unlovable. They find it hard to believe that they are forgiven, accepted, and loved by God regardless of their weird thoughts or questionable actions. I want to share with you what I know to be true - God loves all people regardless of their skin color, ethnicity, jail record, sexual orientation, employment history, marital status, addictions, or socio-economic status. We are all God's children and as far as I'm concerned you are welcome at this church. You are welcome at this church

whether you read the Bible daily or haven't opened a Bible in years. You are welcome at this church whether you believe wholeheartedly in God and Jesus Christ or whether you harbor serious doubts about the veracity of the Bible, the virgin birth, or the Easter Resurrection. You are welcome at this church whether you are a rambunctious little one or a faithful parishioner who is a cornerstone of this congregation (like Jurgen). You do not have to be a perfect person or a perfect Christian, if there even is such a thing, to be welcome here as part of the worshipping community at St. Peter's United Church of Christ. Come with your doubts. Come with your bad singing voice. Come with your empty pockets. Just come, and be one with us as we celebrate, Sunday after Sunday, the Good News of God's love and redemption.

As a way for you to get to know me, let me tell you a little bit about my basic theology, what I believe. I believe that we are here, that our purpose for living is to partner with God in creating God's Reign or God's Kingdom here on earth. God's Reign will finally happen when we have a world where everyone knows they are loved, where people live peacefully, and where justice and equality for all God's people is the norm.

I believe that St. Peter's Church is here so we can all use our time and talents together as we work to create God's Reign in Elmhurst, Illinois and beyond. We are here as a church to transform people's lives. And I know this church is changing people's lives – I've already heard many stories about God's love being shared at St. Peter's church. With the permission of the Elders, starting in October, Jeanne and I would like to start including Sunday morning testimony during worship as to how St. Peter's Church has changed people's lives. The plan would be every Sunday to hear from a different person as to how they found God through St. Peter's United Church of Christ. This is our work as a church – to lead people to God and to the love of Jesus Christ. And this church has been doing this work, and doing it extremely well, for over 125 years. I guarantee that we will all be wowed, amazed, encouraged and thankful to hear how the people of St. Peter's have been following in Jesus' footsteps as you have worked on creating God's Reign of love, justice, equality and peace.

Now, let's admit it. Partnering with God is hard work. Being a Christian is not for sissies. Therefore, to fill us with the love, strength, and courage we need to do

the work of the church, while I am here at St. Peter's we will continue to intensely focus on two things:

- Providing meaningful, life-changing worship every week of the year and,
- Nurturing people of all ages on their faith journeys.

It is only after we have filled people's spiritual wells with wonderful, awe-inspiring worship and given people, both young and old an opportunity to explore their faith that we are able to go out and witness to our faith in service beyond ourselves.

I'm encouraging all of us to follow the Apostle Paul's instructions that he gave the people of Rome in this morning's scripture. This is what Paul wrote:

- Love sincerely.
- Hate what is evil.
- Cling to what is good.
- Be devoted to one another in love.
- Honor one another more than yourself.
- Be joyful, hopeful, patient, and faithfully pray.
- Share with people in need.
- Practice hospitality.
- Be with people on life's journeys. Celebrate with them. Mourn with them.
- Live with them in harmony.
- Live at peace with everyone.
- Feed your enemy.
- Give your enemy something to drink.
- And it can best be summarized as overcoming evil with good.

The Apostle Paul is asking the people of Rome to partner with God in creating God's Reign or God's Kingdom here on earth and I am asking you to partner with me in making sure this church is in tip-top shape by the time your next Senior Pastor comes on board.

One way we're going to do this is that by putting together a Transition Ministry Team to guide the church during this time of transition as we all prepare St. Peter's for the next Senior Pastor. The important part is that, you, the congregation, will be heavily involved in preparing the church for whoever is pasturing you next and this preparation will begin with you naming the people who will work with me, along with your Church President and Vice-President, on

the Transition Ministry Team. The last two Sundays of September we will do this as part of our morning worship. Therefore, between now and September 18th I ask you to be thinking about the three people that you trust the most at St. Peter's Church. These can be people already in leadership positions or these can be people who have yet to become involved as church leaders. During worship on September 18 and 25 we will have a process for you to anonymously offer the names of the three people you trust the most to guide this church. I, in consultation with Candy Bristol and Gene Losey, will see which names are offered the most and we will extend an invitation to these twelve to fifteen people to be part of the Transition Ministry Team. And then the real fun will begin!

To summarize, we are here at St. Peter's to create the Reign of God both in this church and beyond as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the early Christians.

My challenge to all of you this week is this: I would like you to take one new action this week that will help create God's Reign here on earth. Your action does not have to be profound. It can be a simple act of kindness or love. If you'd like a list of what you can be doing, I refer you back to this morning's scripture; Romans 12 verses 9-21. And I leave you to ponder this question, "What could St. Peter's Church start doing or what should St. Peter's Church continue doing that would enhance our partnership with God as we all work toward creating God's Kingdom at St. Peter's church and beyond?"

Amen.