

I went to the basketball game the other night. I find each time I go my mind escapes to another time and place. I remember how it was when I was down there on the court, nervous, excited, investing every ounce of my being in a game.

I played for the Milan Indians. We were not a great basketball TEAM, we did but one thing consistently, lose. fifteen times my ^{senior} year, ~~fourteen~~ ^{with} times my ^{senior} junior year we lost. We had talent, tow of us were voted all conference my senior year, we were as big as most of the teams we played, we never lost by much. But we lost.

Looking back I know where we went wrong. We were twelve young men and one coach, each looking for glory for himself. It was seldom, how can we score, it was always, how can I score. I remember parents coming to see the coach and chew him out because their sons were not getting to shoot enough, I remember being more excited about scoring twenty-three points one night than I was about our winning one of our few games. Each of us looked out for old number one, and we were all the losers.

I always marveled at other teams. Each player had a role, some to shoot, some to concentrate on defense, some to play only when others were in foul trouble. I marveled at how each accepted his role because for them, more important than individual glory was the fate of the team. When the team won everyone won, whether they had scored little or much. ~~When~~ the team lost everyone was the loser, even though ~~they~~ had scored many points.

Basketball is a team sport
It is different with wrestling. There each is on his own. If the team wins, that is well and good, but each remains an individual, with his own record of wins and losses. In basketball either everyone succeeds or no one does, in wrestling each is on his own.

Many people would say that the Christian faith is more like wrestling than basketball. Though we are loosely joined into a church, each of us

stands alone, and will be judged alone. But there is so much of the New Testament that could be applied to basketball more clearly than wrestling. Like the second lesson today.

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ~~the~~ and there are varieties of service by the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

God gives his gifts that we might use them for the common good. We are to be more important than me. WATCH A BASKETBALL game, you will soon know whether that is true or not. Do you see five individuals showing off their talents, or do you see one team working together? It makes all the difference in the outcome.

Today we live in times when the we is not so strong. At one time, long ago it seems that communities must have seen the need of working for the common good. They built parks and swimming pools, schools and churches, each contributing to what all would use. Today we are more prone to invest only for what will be for me and my own. Instead of parks we invest in campers, and boats and what I can own. As a nation this is a shift we see.

But you here in these two churches know about the common good better than most. You know that the churches here depend on you all, that if even a few are lost then the community for all is jeopardized. The need to work together is so apparent.

~~As I read~~

Sometimes in our communities, words are spoken that hurt, or people fail to take notice of contributions and efforts that we make. Then one of two things happen. I hang on to my hurt, or I let go of my hurt. If I am dedicated to the community as being more important than myself, then I can let go. But if I am myself most important to me, then I hang on to the hurt, and don't forgive and community, the common good, is lost.

I've learned about this in my role as the pastor. As a pastor I am

What led head in Christ - for community with us. Forgive - forgive the offender

dedicated to the whole church. My job, my concern is that we all get along. People say things to me that hurt, that offend me, that make me want to run away and not come back. But I work to keep the community together, not because I am a better person, but because it is my job. I can't have the luxury of musing hurt feelings if I am to live in the gift ~~is~~ of a community of believers. I realized this last week that this is true of all of us. A woman called the church and said that we had failed to thank one group of people in the bulletin. Her son was one of those people. That's why she noticed. She could have been offended by our failure, waiting to see if ~~you~~ we would correct our mistake. But she, for the sake of the community, took upon herself what no one asked her to do and called and let us know what we should do. The community, was more important than her feelings.

It is what must happen if a basketball team is to be successful, it is what must happen if the church is to be healthy, everyone one must put the common good above seeing that my needs are being met.

We Americans have so much trouble with ~~it~~ ^{living in community}. We are trained to be individuals, to develop our own talents, to get ahead for ourselves. We want our children to be independent, we train ^{them} in our schools to think for themselves. But God would teach us that all that he gives us is to be used for the common good.

The times are getting harder. We may learn about the common good in new ways. If times get tough enough we will find a new need to share and to help on another. We will find that if we do not ~~work~~ work together then none of us will make it.

Lodgepole and Duck Creek have been models of cooperation in these last years. You have worshipped together, you have sacrificed your individual convenience for the common good of being together. It has been a pleasure to work with you. May God continue to lead us to use the gifts he gives for the common Good. Amen.