

## Sermon

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# together everywhere

Together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 1:2

## Connected: Together | Everywhere

**Main Point:** We are connected in Christ in order to make connections for Christ

**Take-away:** Seek ways to demonstrate that we are “Together | Everywhere”

**Memory Verse:** *“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours.”* 1 Corinthians 1:2

### Introduction

Like many, I enjoyed watching the 2016 Summer Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. One of the things I appreciate most is the great number of people coming together from all over the world to compete. As I watched the opening ceremonies and witnessed people from a variety of different cultures expressing their uniqueness in their attire and their flags, I was also struck with the idea that despite their differences they all came together for a single purpose — in this case to demonstrate and test their athletic abilities against one another.

Having seen this, I imagine another scene: People from every “tribe and language and people and nation” gathered together to worship Jesus Christ. People who have their unique cultural backgrounds but who are connected by one love — the love of Jesus.

Almost every weekend I stand in the church lobby and watch as cars pull into our parking lot and people come through the church doors. Greeting people as they enter, saying hello and finding out how their week has gone, as well as meeting new people and engaging in brief conversations, are things I enjoy doing and look forward to every week.

Getting connected at the local church can take many forms. It might be as simple as helping a new family find the nursery and introducing them to the ministry leader who will care for their child as they worship. Sometimes getting people connected starts with learning their names (an increasing challenge for me, I'm finding out, as I get older).

I particularly enjoy connecting people to each other. For example, a woman I talked with recently shared she had been grieving the death of her husband and heard we had a GriefShare group at the church. Having just seen the leader of that ministry, I immediately brought the two together and after

introducing them, slipped away, praying this connection would be one of the steps God would use to help this woman on her healing journey. I always smile when I see people get connected to each other, especially when those connections lead to growth in the body of Christ.

## **Webs of Connection**

The connections we make with each other remind me of spider webs, which I think are beautiful creations! I'm not quite as enamored by spiders themselves, and I certainly don't like walking into a spider web unawares. (Yes, this has happened to me, more than once, I'm afraid.) But I do think the webs spiders make are beautiful, especially when they are covered with dew or raindrops and they glisten in the sun.

Spider webs illustrate this idea of connection. A spider spins out a single strand of silk that eventually becomes a series of interconnected strands resulting in the web. These webs can be incredibly large. (One web discovered in Madagascar was 82 feet wide. I wouldn't want to walk into that!) Spider webs are also considered very strong, as strong as steel and stronger than Kevlar. In a strange way, then, spider webs may serve to illustrate that the body of Christ is to be like an interconnected body, originating from one source — the gospel of Jesus — and providing strength and protection to all those who are united in that body.

Connection matters. From the beginning Christians have been called to join together. Jesus did not choose *a disciple* but He chose *a group of disciples* to learn, know and share the gospel. After Jesus' death and resurrection, those disciples continued to meet together and to draw others into their fellowship. The Apostle Paul was particularly good at connecting people and demonstrating the value of fellowship. Romans 16 is a great testimony to this as he sends greetings, makes introductions and encourages the community to remain united and focused.

When people come to our church, we hope they will make connections with others through which their faith in Jesus will grow strong and they will find the kinds of relationships they can count on as they journey through life. This is what I pray is happening as people come to worship with us.

But what happens after worship is just as important. After worship services I usually find myself in the church lobby, watching people talk, chase down children, make lunch plans, and, eventually, exit the church, head to their cars and go on their way to their various destinations. The hope is that what happened in worship will not be left behind but will be carried out into the world.

## **Connected with a Purpose**

When we connect together in worship it is for a purpose: to show our love for God and express our humble gratitude to Him. We also connect to be encouraged to share that gratitude and love with the world outside the church walls. We gather, in part, to be prepared to be sent to make connections with others so that we can connect others to Jesus Christ, so that the body of Christ might increase all around the world and take in as many as will receive Jesus as Savior.

1 Corinthians 1:2 speaks to this kind of connection. Paul writes,

*“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours.”*

In this verse Paul reminds us of who we are, what’s happened to us, and how we are connected to one another.

*“To the church of God in Corinth ...”* We might say, “to the church of God in Batavia, New York. Or in Győr, Hungary. Or in Mapau, Haiti. Or in Huaricolca, Peru.” I’ve been blessed to be with the church in each of these places. I was introduced to Jesus in Batavia, and over the last couple of decades, I’ve made short-term mission trips to Hungary, Haiti and Peru. I’ve never failed to appreciate that when the body of Christ gathers to worship there is a connection that is able to transcend language and cultural barriers. Joined together through our love for Jesus, we are one body, one church, as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:4-6:

*There is one body and one Spirit, 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.*

Remembering that it’s God’s church, not my church, helps me to expand my thinking about this. What belongs to me is located in specific places that are mine. But what belongs to God exists as one thing, at the same time everywhere, because God is omnipresent. The church belongs to God, not me, and through His Holy Spirit He is present with His church in all places at once. We may be worshipping on a particular day in Haiti, but we are still just as connected with the church in Hungary because we are not two churches. We are “one body” with “one Lord” and “one Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

We are the church of God. Not just the “we” that worship at a particular building on a Sunday or the “we” that live in the same city or county, but the “we” who live in all of the places around the world where Jesus is loved and obeyed. Regardless of our nationality, we share in common several things that mark us as one body.

- We have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. We have had our sins forgiven, and we have been made holy through our faith in Christ.
- We have been called to be God’s people, living holy lives: lives devoted to honoring God and what He’s done for us.
- We have one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ whom we love and serve and talk about with others.

This is a deep connection that reminds us that we are “Together|Everywhere.”

One of the abiding values of a short-term mission trip is having the names and faces of real people in those places that help us remember there are Christians there, like “here,” living for Jesus. It helps to

bring us together and to care for each other. Hearing on the news that a hurricane is threatening Haiti, I am drawn to remember the Christians I have met there and to pray for them perhaps more personally than I would have otherwise. When I hear that Hungary is wrestling with how to respond to issues raised by the number of immigrants seeking to enter the country, I am reminded to pray that Jesus will guide and encourage the missionaries I have met there. We are to be “Together | Everywhere.”

## **Making Application**

This takes us to thinking about some action steps. How are we to apply this idea that we are connected to the body of Christ wherever that body exists, that we really are “Together | Everywhere”?

One application has already been mentioned. We are to pray for one another. It’s easier to pray for people we have met, but we aren’t limited to that. After all, God knows them even if we don’t! We can learn about people from a different culture even if we can’t (yet!) go to meet them. We can read about mission efforts on the Free Methodist World Missions website ([fmcusa.org/fmmissions](http://fmcusa.org/fmmissions)) in order to learn how to pray specifically.

Another action step is to support missionaries who are on the ground in many places around the world. Financial support is important, but so is the support offered through letters or invitations to speak when those missionaries are on home assignment.

A short-term mission trip can be a good way to experience that we are “Together | Everywhere” but be sure to approach this from the start with the help of the VISA Ministries office so that it is truly beneficial to those serving in the place being considered for a visit.

In *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges* (2015) David Sills writes: “Even after almost two thousand years of missions, over half of the world’s people groups are considered unreached. These unreached people groups represent over one-third of the world’s population. This is an astounding reality when we consider how quickly Coca-Cola went from its invention in 1896 to being recognized by 95 percent of the world’s population today.”

Short-term mission trips aren’t sufficient to address the need of reaching the unreached, but they are one way a local church can become more connected with what God is doing in and through Christians in other places in the world and can remind us again that we are “Together | Everywhere.” Sills writes:

The ways that STM [short-term mission] teams can be utilized are limited only by the creativity of the missionary inviting and hosting them, and much more good happens than many people realize. Team participants return with their eyes opened to the needs of the world, aware of the needs of missionaries and challenges of missionary life, connected with new friends among the national brothers and sisters, and able to pray fervently with firsthand insight.

Churches can also encourage their people to consider listening for and responding to a call from the

Lord to engage in full-time mission work. As a pastor, I can remind people that God still makes this call, and I can be available to help guide those who might be receiving it.

Small groups can be encouraged to study what God is doing around the world; people can sponsor children through ICCM (International Child Care Ministries); a sermon series can be developed to highlight our togetherness in Christ. There are many ways we can make this practical.

## **An Answer to a Public-Health Crisis**

A TIME.com article in March 2015 was titled, “Why Loneliness May Be the Next Big Public-Health Issue.” It’s a sad thing to realize that in a world more connected than ever by air travel, Skype, the Internet, cell phones and email, there are scores of people who feel lonely. As the body of Christ we need to be devoted to doing all we can to help combat the disease of loneliness by building connections.

We need those connections to be made in the local church, and we need to be seeking ways to connect with the body of Christ around the world. We also need to keep seeking ways to connect those outside of the body of Christ with the new life available in Jesus. The greatest witness we have of the truth of the gospel and the love of Jesus is found in our unity with one another (John 17:20-22). In other words, as we demonstrate that we are “Together|Everywhere,” we do just the thing Jesus asked us to do.