

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

1045 Old Academy Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824

Telephone: 203-259-5596



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Date: October 21, 2012  
Sermon Title: Connected  
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12  
Pastor: Rev. Alida Wrad

I brought a souvenir along this morning to show you -- a souvenir in the very classic sense of the word -- The word souvenir just means to remember, and the point of this lamp, this lamp whose lampshade is covered with words scrawled with Sharpies, is just to remember.

It's been sitting on my desk since early July, and every time I look at it I *remember*. I remember this year's mission trip to Appalachia, a trip when the simple act of plugging in a lamp and turning it on wasn't so simple.

Here's what happened this year, something you heard a little about in the stories told on Appalachia Sunday just last month. Here's what happened. It was Saturday morning June 30th, and we were rolling down the Jersey Turnpike toward Appalachia, and by we, I mean three coach buses and seven vans, 200 people. And I was feeling pretty good. A year's worth of fundraising, orientation meetings, organizing, was now behind me, and by golly, we were on our way. I sighed a happy sigh of relief, and picked up my Kindle to bide my time until we got to Roanoke College, where all 200 of us would spend the first night of our trip, before we headed into the mountains of West Virginia. My phone rang, and I glanced at the caller ID. Appalachia Service Project headquarters, it read. How sweet of them to call, I thought, obviously checking in to wish us well. "Helloooo," I said. Here's what the voice on the other end said. "Umm – just wondering, have you left Connecticut yet?" Had we left Connecticut yet? Had we LEFT Connecticut yet? Three buses, seven vans, 200 people., 400 suitcases, and 800 power tools? Oh yeah, we'd left. .

"Oh, shoot," he said. There's really no good spin you can put on someone saying "oh shoot" in a moment like that. "What's going on?" I asked. "Well, it's this storm we had last night", he said, "they're calling it a derecho? Crazy windstorm – We got trees down everywhere, West Virginia is in a state of

emergency, and the power is out to everywhere your kids are supposed to go to. The schools they're supposed to stay in have no water, no power. No nothin'." "Any chance," he said, "any chance at all that you can *delay* just one day?" One day – two hundred people – and nowhere to go. I really truly thought I would throw up.

And here's where I put in a big plug for Roanoke College in Virginia. We were supposed to spend just one night there on our way to West Virginia. But when they heard what was going on, when they heard we had nowhere to go until ASP was ready for us, they told us to hang out with them as long as we needed to. And it's not like they weren't in chaos too; they had trees down all over campus, there was power out to half of Roanoke. But they said this – We're just honored to be connected to your work, they told us. If there's one thing we learn from this, the director of housing told me, it's that we all need each other, and that we're all connected.

And that's what we continued to experience from that moment on. That powerful sense of connection, that sense of connection to a greater power, all of that continued. A third of our group got the all-clear to head to their work center, and as soon as they arrived, the power and water went out again. But a church up the road let them come use the water there to make meals and wash dishes, and a gas station that still had power let them blow up all their air mattresses there. Again, that powerful sense of connection -- again, that connection to a power.

At another county, our ASPers had power and water in the place where they were staying, but a lot of the homes they were working on didn't. So they took bottled water with them to the homes, and neighbors who had power ran crazy long extension cords over so our kids could run their saws and drills. Connected to one another, connected to power, connected to a greater power.

When I was a kid, my dad used to love to show me how stuff worked, which was great, 'cause I loved knowing how stuff worked, still do. And I remember one time he and I made this awesomely huge electrical circuit, with wires running all over the place, and switches, and lightbulbs and of course in the middle of the circuit a big ol' battery. And I learned the most basic truth of all: that the light doesn't come on unless it's connected to the battery, that if you lift the arm on any of those little switches and break the connection, the light goes off. But if you make sure that all the wires are in place and all the connections sure, then pow, that light sure shines. And that's why I keep this lamp on my desk. All over this lampshade, at the end of our trip, kids and adults scribbled down words to express *how they felt power in the midst of no*

*electricity*, how they felt connection when the lines were down all over, how they experienced the light of God's own love even when the darkness fell in West Virginia. They wrote words like *peace ... hope... friendships.... support*.

The power of connection, and the connection to a higher power.

That's what the Apostle Paul was talking about, of course, long before batteries and lightbulbs and switches and wires, long before there was such a thing as a power outage or lamps that glowed with no oil.

We're all connected, he was saying, we're all connected to each other; there is one heart that beats through all of us, one energy that enlivens each one of us, one life that is our shared life. We're like one body, he said, and what you feel I feel, when I hurt you hurt, when you rejoice I rejoice.

Last Saturday I was off in the woods near Middletown, along with the members of this year's Confirmation Class, on our opening retreat. The kids are always slightly terrified about what an opening retreat for Confirmation is going to look like; I think they envision monastic solitude and solemn contemplation of biblical verses.

Actually, we play games. The staff at the YMCA camp we go to, who have been working with me on this retreat for years now, design a day of, yes, games, but games with a purpose. And the purpose is **connection**. In the games that we play, nothing works, nothing is solved, the day is not won unless everyone is connected. This is probably most clear during one particular game which doesn't appear much like a game at all. A wire, a heavy wire, is strung from tree to tree, five trees in all, about two feet off the ground, and your entire group has to tightrope their way from the beginning of the wire to the end, five trees away. That's all they're told. *Everyone get from the beginning to the end*. And so they try. One after the other, they get up on the wire, begin to inch their way along, and fall off. Which means you have to go back to the back of the line. Until finally -- and always -- someone says "Hey, is it okay if we help each other"? and yes, of course, it is. In fact, that's the only way the game is won. And ten minutes later, what you see is a long line of 13 year olds, holding hands all the way along from tree to tree, standing on tightropes and not falling because they are all connected. The power of being connected; the connection to one power. There it is.

That's **it**, the Apostle Paul would say if he saw that. That's what I'm talking about. That's how it works. That's how church works - the power of connection. The connection, through each other, to a power higher than us all.

In church life this is actually Connection *season*. I know what you're thinking -- yeah, right, Alida, this is actually Stewardship season -- you want me to fill out a lime green pledge card, help meet the budget for 2013. What are you talking about, Connection season.

Well, I mean it. The only reason we offer our gifts, our pledges to this church, is because we know the power of connection. We know what it means to be bound to one another and what great, great good is done when that happens. But it's not just those ugly green cards, it's not just pledging our financial gifts that connects us to each other. We connect through what we give through love and time and caring, too. That's what those yellow sheets in the bulletin are about, - we got green, we got yellow today - those yellow sheets are from our Member Involvement Board asking you if there's some way you'd like to be connected through this church through serving, helping, doing, participating.

All of this, all of these are just different ways of connecting to one another so that what we have here is the same thing my dad liked to show me on the circuit board - that when the wires are all intertwined, no breaks, and no gaps, then the power surges through and the light shines out. When we are connected to one another through our love and our gifts and our time and our prayer then the power that flows through us is something pretty amazing: the Spirit of God at work between and among us. And the light that shines out is astonishing. You heard our Mission Board representative talk about it just a little while ago -- through what we give and how we care, we end up shining light and love into the life of a child in India or an immigrant woman next door or a veteran home from the wars and seeking hope.

"We promise" our church covenant says, that covenant we say whenever new members join our church, "we promise to strive in every way to make this church a power for good in the service of God and humanity." And when we connect, we *are* that power. The power of connection is made real; *connected* to the power of love, we *are* love.

Each month on a Sunday evening, a bunch of folks gather back here in the Parlor for what we call the book chat -- We get together to talk about a book that has something to say to our faith, something inspiring, or challenging, or just really good. Last month, thanks to a suggestion from Roni Widmer, we read a little book called *Same Kind of Different as Me*.

And what it was all about was the power of connection.

It's an extraordinary story, and a true one, about two people without any *discernible* point of connection at all. One man, Ron Hall, was -- and is -- a

wealthy art dealer in Fort Worth, who at the time was living the perfect American life -- fabulous home, income, family. The other, Denver Moore, was a homeless man, former sharecropper from Louisiana, a violent and angry man, in and out of jail. They met because Ron Hall's wife Deborah, one day dragged him along to the soup kitchen her church ran, and it happened to be a day that Denver came for a meal.

And there is no real explanation for what happened between Ron and Denver except to say that it was the power of God's own love that drew them together in connection. Something about meeting each other made them realize how distant they had each become from God, Ron because of his success, Denver because of his anger, and in that realization they came to know how much they were like each other. And one day, sharing coffee, Ron said to Denver simply, "I would like to be your friend." And Denver said this: "If you mean it, I will be your friend forever."

To this day, they *are* friends, Ron and Denver, and not only friends but co-workers, speaking together on behalf of the hurting and homeless nationwide.

*I used to worry, Denver Moore says in the book, that I was different from other people. But I found out everybody's different - the same kind of different as me. We're all just regular folks walkin down the road God set in front of us. The truth about it is, whether we're rich or poor or somethin in between, this earth ain't no final restin place. So in a way, we're all homeless - just workin our way toward home together."*

I've told you about Roanoke College taking us in, and a gas station that pumped up our kids air mattresses; I've told you about a tightrope with kids holding hands on it to hold each other up, and a homeless man and a rich man who are now best of friends. And I've told you about covenants and pledges and serving, and what all of this has in common, what all of this is about, is the same simple thing that Paul told his friends two thousand years ago: We are one body. We have one heart.

And when we remember that, when we let it be true, when we feel the power of connection and connection to the power, then we are amazing, and we are light and we are love. Amen.