

**“Connecting As Family”**  
Rev. Dr. Scott Paczkowski  
and Kelly Bronsink

The Psalm [127] talks about a gift - and that gift is the Holy Spirit - which is the heritage of God and the heritage of God are the symbols of our past, that speak to the present and inform our future. Today we had that baptism, when Evelyn Mae was brought to the font and she received that heritage - a heritage that goes all the way back to John the Baptist, who baptized even Jesus the Christ. And, that heritage continues in the present, because Adam and Brianne’s family light a candle for each child that is baptized. I have been told [it’s] a German tradition. And, in their family a candle is lit for each baptized child, as a symbol as of the Holy Spirit - the light of the world - that burns within their heart and it fills their quiver, and not only with boys and girls, who grow up to be men and women, but with the Spirit that carries and follows them each and every day of their lives. That is part of the heritage of *that* family.

Each one of you has your own heritage, your own way of connecting with God and with community - and God is so profoundly caring and blessed of community.

In the Old Testament, God only viewed resurrection as something that happened to the whole community of faith. In fact, in the first five books of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy - the idea of a Resurrection is not mentioned at all. Community was where God spoke to the people and it was only later in the Old Testament, that the idea of a “resurrection” of an individual soul came into being. That is how formalized that the idea of a “community” was imbedded in the culture of the Jewish people.

Now, even as we move into the New Testament, the first thing that Jesus did when his ministry began was not just to go out and proclaim the Gospel, but first before he did that, Jesus went out and gathered apostles and disciples, because community was necessary before the Gospel could be preached. What Jesus did was to pick 12 apostles. Twelve. That goes all the way back to the Old Testament, with the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 tribes of Israel, meant the entire people of Israel.

So, when Jesus gathered the 12 apostles, he was gathering so that *all* of God’s children would be part of the faith. Everyone would be part of this community of faith. That is what this means: that our faith, disconnected from community, is weak and our connection to God shallow, and hard to receive. We need to be part of a community - in a church - to feel the full extent of the Spirit of God.

So, I would like us to think about connections and community and, today, I have asked Kelly Bronsink to come up and share her story of connectedness within her family and in her church family.

[Kelly Bronsink’s story:]

My name is Kelly Bronsink. My husband, Josh, and I joined Westminster in 2011. We have two children: our son Sam, age 11, and daughter Audrey, age 7. We have attended church here with our kids, and out of that, my parents, Lester and Deloris Wacht, joined the church; and, in the last year, my sister, Keri, and niece, Ava, have also joined. It's become a family connection we share together.

My children love coming here. They have deep connections to many special people and peers, it's made faith the center of their life. They talk about their beliefs regularly and really rely on their faith as they grow. My niece looks forward to coming each week and we have seen her blossom here in the love of this church. Westminster has provided my family with a strong foundation that will last for a lifetime.

My children have come to look forward to the tradition that this church provides. They love the Easter festivities - especially the baby chicks. The Christmas Eve service has become a part of our family Christmas tradition. We have watched their knowledge of the Bible and its lessons expand under the new curriculum for Wednesday night activities. Our daughter can now look up just about any verse in the Bible. That is a huge accomplishment for someone who is seven. Sam and Ava have enjoyed bonding over the summer with the other kids from junior high and high school. It made a difficult transition in life so much easier for them. Many of their good friends here also go to school with them, which gives them a strong base.

We feel very blessed to have so many special people in our life from church. Being an Elder [in] Children's Education has allowed me to make some special connections with other mothers.

Not only have we made friends, but we have been greatly helped by all [of] the members of this church. Two years ago my husband was deathly ill. Not only did we have two special Deacons checking on us regularly - thank you, Jan Bannister and John Iles - Pastor Scott and Pastor Arentson provided me with the strength to go on each day. We have felt that the support we have received from Westminster is part of the reason he [Josh] is here with us now.

My children are so blessed to have so many people who watch over them and provide them with love and acceptance. My daughter literally hugs about everyone she sees here. We have really felt the blessing of connections with several generations. My kids get to spend quality time with people of all ages. They have lots of "extra" family through church that can provide them with wonderful examples. My parents, too, have felt that this place is home for them. Everyone is very kind and gracious to all who come through the doors.

I feel like the opportunity to become an Elder has really given me a deeper connection to the church and all its needs. I am not only able to contribute my time and ideas, but we also make it a priority to provide financial support to the church. Without that support we couldn't provide the new programming for kids that we have this year, which has excited them all so much.

I love knowing what we contribute actually helps people, whether it's through the mission program, helping with the new commitment to Monroe Elementary, or buying supplies for the kids' programming, and I see the product of our support. We firmly believe in the ideals

of Westminster and it's so rewarding to feel that our pledges go to help things we really feel strongly about. This church has not only extended our family, but made our family stronger, and for that I am eternally grateful.

[Kelly returns to her seat.]

Scott: Thanks, Kelly. I appreciate the fact that Kelly was willing to speak because she shares from all parts of the connectedness of our church. She has children and has a niece who are involved in youth activities. Then you have her family and extended family involved. It is truly a blessing and I really appreciate her willingness to share.

A community of the church does not survive by magic. Our community is where people come together and it requires commitment. Church requires your participation. It requires your prayers and it requires your financial commitment, as well.

But, I am so grateful for all of the people who have given so much of their time. Kelly mentioned it, in just the way that her children and her niece have been cared for by the congregation. I remember when her niece, Ava, started coming. She was so shy. She was scared, because she hadn't been baptized and we had to do the baptism. So, we waited, because she wasn't sure, at her age, that she could get up in front of people. Now, we have trouble getting Ava out of here on Sunday mornings. [Laughter.] It's that kind of special warmth. It's filling that quiver of our church, that so many of the kids who feel cared for and supported.

I have had friends through the years who didn't go to church, and I have always said to them [that] having a good, healthy child isn't a given when you go to church, but it doesn't hurt, because you will get to a certain point with your children when they stop listening to you the same way they did when they were younger. They get to a certain age, in teenage years especially, when mom and dad don't know anything, and the wonderful thing is that while you become really dumb, as parents, during those years - that 6-10 years when you don't know anything - you have all of these other people in the church who still know something. [Laughter.] They [your kids] will listen to them, while you are still trying to learn what you should be doing. And, in those moments, they have that backup to go to. Instead of going to friends who can take them down some pretty strange roads, they have other adults in this congregation who can instruct them, remind them and reinforce what you have been telling them all along. That makes all of the difference sometimes. That is, your presence in being here. Your participation isn't just for you. It's so you can provide ministry to all of those others, so that they can experience God's Holy Spirit.

What you have done in that heritage has sent hundreds - if not thousands - of young people into this world to make a difference in Jesus' name. We are doing that right now as we hear those little bells being played. And, we will hear it for years to come, because so many of you are committed to others and not just yourselves.

So, I want to say, "thank you," for each one of you who have taken the time, the energy, the prayerful time, the financial gifts, everything that it takes, because being here isn't a given. We have to work each day to allow this place to continue to be a place where Christ dwells.

When I see so many other churches closing their doors and - it is happening every single day - the fact that we are still strong and vital is because of the Holy Spirit's blessing and each one of you responding. Thank you for the way you are connecting, caring, and I pray we will continue to do so for many years to come. That is the difference that we need to continue to make now and for evermore. Amen.