

## EA: We Are The Church

Here we are at the half-way point on this journey becoming love. That is really the message of Bob Goff's book, Everybody Always. The subtitle is "Becoming love in a world full of setbacks and difficult people." Unity teaches we **ARE** love in our essence, already. The true nature of our divine self is love. So Unity's subtitle might be "Becoming more of an *expression of love* in a world full of setbacks and difficult people." To-may-to To-mah-to. We have a ways to go. I'll just speak for myself: **I** have a ways to go show up in the world **consistently** as love.

So what do you think is the purpose of church? Any church? Our church?  
*Listening.*

Preparing for this sermon I discovered something interesting. According to the search engine for my online NRSV Bible, there are no references to "church" in the Old Testament. There are 189 references to "temple" but no church. Church appears first in Matthew when Jesus is alleged to have said "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Peter represents Faith. Also interesting is that none of the *other* gospels mention "church". It appears that while a temple is a building, church is something different. The gospels mention "temple" as a building where Jesus taught and overturned the tables of the money changers. Church, built on faith, shows up more as spiritual community. Jesus also says in Matthew, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." If we accept that the author of Matthew was a converted Jew, it may make some sense for him to want to establish the unique nature of church as separate from temple.

The early churches were groups of people following the teachings of this new guy, Jesus. They met in secret, often persecuted, so they gathered in homes and had no buildings. The Letters of Paul were mostly advice to these early gatherings on how to be together—how to be the church envisioned by Jesus. Many of the non-gospel books include the concept of church. And all of the advice to and about church is more or less in the same vein—Get Along! Love One Another. Chapter 18 in Matthew addresses getting along as Peter ultimately asks, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" And of course the response is "Not seven times but seventy-seven times." Expand your practice of forgiveness as a part of spiritual community. Expand waaaay beyond your expectation of what is reasonable.

We at Unity of Lehigh Valley say that our mission is “United in love we provide a positive environment for all people to discover and express their spiritual nature.” Our very first challenge is to “unite in love”.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians: “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” 1:10 “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks” 10:32

There is a lot of advice in Corinthians. To “unite in love” we must set aside our differences within ULV and out in the community of faith traditions. We must be of the same mind and the same **purpose** within our spiritual community and not try to set ourselves above other spiritual communities. Back to our purpose. “We provide a positive environment for all people to discover and express their spiritual nature.” So I kind of need to ask a question here. Does our statement say, “provide a positive environment **in this building** for **all the people who manage to find us**”? I mean, I don’t think it excludes that but is it **limited** to that? I loved the ideas we shared at last week’s UP meeting and I noticed that basically all of the ideas focused on **US**. Just us. It made me think of the Croc Drop.

One of the stories in Bob’s book is titled “Croc Drop”. C R O C. I was amused because Bob and I had different ideas about what that meant. I imagined multi-colored rubber shoes raining down. I read that Bob imagined toothy, scaly reptiles falling down. Now I was concerned how far you could drop one of **his** kind of crocs without someone getting hurt; either the reptile or someone near its landing. In the story Bob is invited to speak at a church in Alabama celebrating its annual Croc Drop and he enthusiastically accepts without asking any questions. He is off to an adventure for sure! He arrives and is taken to a huge warehouse. He describes his arrival: “I got to the door, puffed out my chest, took a deep breath and said out loud, ‘Bring it’.” Inside he was baffled. There were more potatoes and people than he had seen in one spot **EVER**. A young man came up, vigorously shook his hand and introduced himself as the one who had invited Bob. Glancing nervously at the ceiling Bob worked up the courage to finally ask, “Where are the crocodiles and where do you drop them?” The host looked puzzled. “You know, for the croc drop,” Bob added. The young man grinned. “Oh, no. This is a **CROP** drop.” He went on to explain that the surrounding area is a center for potato production and most fields are harvested by machine.

The machines leave a lot of potatoes on the ground and the area churches go in, gather them up and bag them to distribute to those in need of food. Bob's perspective shifted and the nature of his adventure shifted.

He says, "It was such a beautiful picture of what the church is and who we're supposed to be. Inside the warehouse there were no name tags, no members, no separate identities, no building programs, and no discussion of theology or who was right and who was wrong. It was just a bunch of people bagging passed over food to give away to people in the community who probably felt passed over too. People who are becoming love lose all labels because they know they don't need them." So it made me think about a different kind of dinner we could plan in addition to what we've discussed. Maybe picking a menu item once a month and everyone fix a pan to take to Victory House located on Fillmore Street in Bethlehem. Either we can deliver it frozen or stay and serve. Or we could serve meals once a month at New Bethany Ministries. Just an idea of what being church in the community, outside our four walls might look like. Still providing a positive environment, still empowering others to see themselves as divine beings because we see them and treat them as such.

Paul wrote to the community in Ephesus: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Ephesians 5:21 In lieu of "subject to" I suggest Paul really meant, "Be **in service to** one another out of reverence for Christ." In knowing the divine within each one, we serve our divine connection, not the personality. We are not serving our own ego personality and we are serving without regard to the personality of those who receive our service. Bob says this about loving service: "They don't need anyone to clap for them. They don't need validation for things they know are inherently right and true and beautiful. They don't need all the accolades that come with recognition." He also says, "People who are becoming love talk a lot more about what God's doing than what they're doing because they've stop keeping score. The next time you are tempted to boast, just say under your breath, 'It's not about me.' Say it a dozen times a day. Say it again and again. When we keep track of the good we've done or love people with an agenda, it's no longer love; it's just a bunch of tickets. We can either keep track of all the good we've done or all the good God's done." I am not saying we're going to do away with our gratitude practices or stop acknowledging the great service teams we have. I just wonder how much of what we do could be done in service to our divine connection without a spotlight on it.

I encourage us to reflect on whether we measure our service giving by the degree to which we expect to receive recognition. What if you set a goal for anonymous service and lived “it’s not about me” in your service? What if we begin to ask just how much God can do **through** us when we make it about God’s work and not our work? If we **are** the church and there is only One Power **in this church** and in **each** of us, then our affirmation, “Spirit has a mighty work for us to do” is more about *Spirit* and less about *us*.

The book of James, in chapter 5 asks, “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.” This verse gives me two different purposes of the church or us as spiritual community. In calling for the elders, it tells me spiritual community is a place for growing into spiritual maturity. We have a core value of community and a core value for spiritual growth. Clearly it is in the consciousness of this church to be a place of connection and growth. And that requires what? Oh, **forgiveness**. Bob says this about people becoming love: “They also don’t feel the need to criticize people who have gotten a couple things wrong or hit a couple sour chords in their lives. I don’t know about you but I’ve gotten to the end of the day more than a few times and realized my untucked shirt was uneven at the bottom. I’m usually just one button off but sometimes two. There is a quiet confidence in knowing we all hit a couple of wrong notes here and there. The report card on our faith is how we treat one another when we do.”

Spiritual maturity is the ability to see past the errors in the actions and words of others and ourselves to the divine potential that continues to shine. We let go of the need to be right. It is practicing “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love,” our communication commitment. It is shining a light on my ego/personality issues and discerning what the real issue might be in any conflict within the community. Then I can lift up issues without the baggage of my personal emotional work. If you haven’t look at our Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love commitments, the document is on the website. And I think I’ll talk about it next year. For now, the interesting thing about growing into spiritual maturity is that we heal ourselves and we become a part of healing in others. How does it feel to be treated with respect and dignity? How does it feel to receive support when we most need it? We feel whole. We discover the wholeness within ourselves. Isn’t that our purpose? To support all people in making the discovery of their spiritual nature and learning to express it?

The Bob Goff quote that is on our Facebook page is this:

“Something happens when you feel ownership. You no longer act like a spectator or consumer, because you're an owner. Faith is at its best when it's that way too. ***It's best lived when it's owned.***”

WE ARE THE CHURCH! Whatever you want this church to be, to do, to show up as, to fix, to become—that is your personal goal. We continue to say our true nature is Love. We are divine beings in a human experience. Own it. Own your true nature and live it out through this human experience.

Becoming a greater expression of love is the transformation not only of you but of Unity of Lehigh Valley. In 2019 we will celebrate 40 years of being love in the Lehigh Valley. Our true nature is love and our purpose to be love in expression has not changed in 40 years. Are we flawed? Without doubt.

Every single one of us. Does that matter to Spirit? Not one bit. Spirit has a mighty work for us to do and work happens **through us**. We are the channel for divine power.