

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
2 June 2024

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

## ***“Together, We Value: CARING”***

First sermon in *Part I: Together, We Value*  
of the series: *Together, We are Community*

Discernment Insight #1:

CARING: Calvary is built on caring, connections and relationships, and on loving God and loving each other.

### ***Ruth 2:1-23***

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

Calvary, *Together we are Community* and *Together, we value: CARING.*

And there is no better time than this week to talk about what it means to Care.

On the occasion of International Children's Day, which was yesterday, June 1, the names of Gazan children killed in Israeli attacks were read out loud in the German capital of Berlin. Knowing the horror of genocide and extermination in their own history, three Berlin women organized this event in front of one of the city's central monument buildings; they placed thousands of pairs of children's shoes on the sidewalk to draw attention to the mass murder in Gaza. All day

yesterday until midnight, hundreds of Berliners—of all nationalities and religions—signed up in 5-10 minute segments to read aloud the name of the over 15,000 children from Gaza who have died since Oct. 7.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, this week in our country, our current President *finally* called for ceasefire in Gaza, but his plea rings hollow in the ears of leaders around the world and citizens across this country and beyond who have been pleading for the United States to stop using our military dollars to support the IDF with this genocide for months. And then of course also this week, our former president was found guilty on 34 counts of falsifying business records related to a payment that silenced a woman

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<sup>1</sup> Erbil Basay and Melike Pala, “Names of over 15,000 Gazan children killed by Israel read aloud in Berlin,” *Anadolu Agency* (June 1, 2024), accessed on June 2,

2024 at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/names-of-over-15-000-gazan-children-killed-by-israel-read-aloud-in-berlin/3237552#>.

so she wouldn't speak. I don't know about you, but it seems to me that the moral character and ethical compass of the leadership in our country in *this* moment reminds us that to CARE for one another—to truly *care* for one another—is a radical act!

To love God, to love others, to love ourselves, our common humanity—this is the Gospel Good News of Jesus Christ. This is not the news of any country or system or political leader. Our Savior, that is, the one who brings the *salve*, the balm, the healing and wholeness, the *shalom* to our souls and to the lives of each and very beloved child of God, is Christ. And through Christ, through that Divine image and impetus, we bring it one another.

So you see, to love and to care for one another...these are not “fluff” words of Jesus. They are the law of the people of God that Jesus himself learned as a child in the Temple and they are the heart of the Gospel—the essence of the Good News—that still remains the *very good and needed Truth* in our world today: the news that we must proclaim with all that we are and all that we have: to love, to

CARE, to create community so that we can care for those within our community, and to care for those in other communities beyond our own. Lord, have mercy. May we take this simple truth and ignite it in our hearts! To CARE. To not withdraw in apathy. To not turn off the news in numbness. Sure, to take a break or a step back if we need to, *and then* to lean back in and keep caring, keep loving, keep hoping, keep working, keep crying out – because if we who follow Christ are not CARING, what are we doing? *Everything* Jesus did on this earth was an Act of Care.

It's just been one of those weeks y'all. One of those weeks where at the same moment that our lament, grief, shock, dismay is off the charts, so, too, has our clarity in conviction and purpose become crystal clear. There is no ambiguity in the call to Care that Christ is issuing to each and every one of us.

And, so it's with this clarity that we begin this summer series on what it means to be a community. A series on what we value, what we believe, and how we organize ourselves to serve and embody our values and our beliefs here at Calvary,

and within our own personal lives too.

The full outline of our summer series, *Together we are Community*, is explained in your service notes.<sup>2</sup> Today, we begin with what we value, and I'll remind you that the four values we're exploring in June are the values that we, Calvary, named and identified in our discernment process a year ago. We are revisiting these values now to remind us of what we have collectively said is important to our community, and to deepen our understanding of what these values actually mean and what new meaning might emerge as we take a deeper dive.

So, Insight #1 **Together, We Value: CARING**—*“Calvary is built on caring, connections and*

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<sup>2</sup> This summer we're grounding ourselves in who we are as Calvary Baptist Church of Denver and how our communal identity shapes and informs our individual spiritual journeys. The truth is, Together, We are Community.

We've discovered over the past year through ongoing discernment and listening to all of our voices at Calvary how the Spirit is been leading us in new directions even as we hold on to foundational values that speak truth to who we are and where and how God is calling us. Every voice matters in this discernment and discovery.

This summer sermon series, which will utilize theological, scriptural, and experiential lenses, is divided in three sections:

- 1) Together, We Value: the four insights from our church-wide discernment process: Caring, Sharing Our Story, Financial Wellness, Healthy Partnerships
- 2) Together, We Believe: the theological and biblical foundations of these three recent themes: Beloved (Be,

*relationships, and on loving God and loving each other.”*

Our text today is brilliant in highlighting this value of *Caring*—on the personal level, and the communal/systemic level.

A brief re-cap of how we get to today's text and what is happening in today's text:<sup>3</sup>

Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons leave their home in Bethlehem (which literally means ‘house of bread’) and flee to Moab during a famine. Moab is enemy territory; it's on the other side of the Red Sea, in what is modern day Jordan.

While they are in Moab, Naomi's husband dies. Their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion,

Be Love, Beloved), cultivating a Spirit of Curiosity, proclaiming, “It is Well...”

3) Together, We Serve: through the boards and teams of our new lay leadership structure that seeks to honor and utilize the unique skills and gifts of each person in our church

As we ground ourselves as a community in relationship to God, one another, and the world, we will also explore how all of these themes and topics about our life together at Calvary intersect with our own spiritual journeys. We hope this will be an educational series for you, as well as an inspiring one. We would not be Calvary without YOU! Your presence is essential to who we are today and where God is calling us in the future. What a gift it is to be on the journey together.

<sup>3</sup> Many thanks to this resource for the recap: Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), pg 13-14.

grow up in Moab and marry Moabite women. Time passes and tragedy strikes again. These two sons die, leaving these three women—Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth—widowed and childless. Which in the Ancient Near East, pretty much means you have no livelihood in the present (without a man) and no purpose or legacy for your future (without children). Naomi is so distressed she says in chapter 1, *“no longer call me Naomi, but call me Mara, which means bitter, because I am so empty in grief”* (Ruth 1:20-21).

But finally a good word comes. Naomi receives word that there is food again back home in Bethlehem, and she begins to return to her homeland with her foreign daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

On the way to Bethlehem, Naomi stops and has this moment of realization that what she desires is actually not best for these two young women who are widows, so she urges Orpah and Ruth to return to their own homes in Moab so they could have a chance at marriage again, and therefore also, children.

They both resist, but after Naomi’s insistence, Orpah

eventually and reluctantly returns home.

Ruth, however, refuses to leave Naomi, and accompanies her to Bethlehem at the time of harvest. To provide sustenance for herself and her mother-in-law, Ruth gleans in the fields and draws the attention of the landowner Boaz. Boaz is very kind to Ruth and allows her to glean barley in his fields with extreme generosity.

Indeed, because of Boaz’s generosity and God’s providence – Bethlehem is again the ‘house of bread’ for these women who find themselves well cared for, even as they care for one another.

If you want to know the end of the story, go home and read chapters three and four this week. For today’s purposes, we will focus on these two spheres of caring that we see in the first two chapters: 1) one-to-one caring in friendship and relationship, and 2) systemic caring in community.

First, the **one-to-one caring**. Both Ruth and Naomi show us that **caring is a choice** that we make over and over again.

Being a Moabite women in Bethlehem would have been deeply frowned upon and despised, so Naomi being willing to enter her hometown with Moabite daughters-in-law says a lot about her care for them. She is not ashamed of them. She wants them near.

Side note: part of this work of caring is *self*-work. Knowing what it means for *ourselves* to be cared for well, so that we can share with others how to care well for us. None of us can read minds. One of the deepest ways we can grow as a caring community is to know what we need and to voice it. Naomi does this, she says, “I need you, journey with me.”

And then after they journey a while she realizes another need. She thinks of *their* need. And here we see her plea for them to go back to Moab mid-journey and we see how this also reveals her care. She realizes their futures best lie with the chance for husbands and children in Moab, not taking care of her.

But it’s in this moment that we see Ruth take caring to the next level. Ruth sees staying with her mother-in-law as an act of care, regardless of what it means for her marriage prospects or the

chance to have children of her own. She is committed to the relationship in front of her, the one for whom she is to care for in *this* moment: Naomi. It’s not that Orpah doesn’t care, she cares too, and is grieved to leave. However, Ruth shows us a depth of caring here that many of you might be able to relate to in terms of being caregivers. It’s a calling that goes beyond what you would perhaps choose for yourself and that you didn’t ask for or plan for to happen right now, but you wouldn’t be anywhere else, would you?

It’s like Ruth sees this relationship of care with her mother-in-law as a non-negotiable. Her care for her transcends boundaries and societal norms; Ruth’s care for Naomi would not have been understood by those on the outside looking in. Just as many of you who care for others in deep and life-altering ways might struggle to explain such depth of caregiving to others. It’s the kind of care that is a calling and a *choice* that Ruth has to make each day that she wakes up, and Naomi too. Sometimes I wonder if the depth of care these two women felt for each other was there because of the trauma and grief they had endured together. This is a

reality too; care that is formed through common, shared experience.

Caring relationships like that of Naomi and Ruth do not have easy answers; what they have is commitment.

And it's this commitment that carries Ruth to Bethlehem with Naomi, and that immediately puts Ruth on the lookout for food and sustenance and a way to care for her mother-in-law. Ruth does not see it as sacrificing herself or her future for her mother-in-law. She says, *"where you go, I will go; your people will be my people; your god my god,"* (Ruth 1:16.).

So this one-to-one caring relationship between Ruth and Naomi and Naomi and Ruth (which fleshes out even more in chapters three and four) is the first key take away for us today of what it means to care in community. Caring looks like investing in one another's lives in a way that intertwines our lives with other people's lives. It means knowing their people, going to where they go, taking an interest in their interests (religion and all!). It means taking risks. It means not thinking first about *"what will this mean for me if I do this*

*thing and care for this person,"* but, *"what will this mean for the other person if I don't do this thing or care for them in this way?"*

The amazing thing about our community Calvary, is that many of you have deep and long, committed caring relationships with friends and fellow congregants. You come here because you are known well by others, perhaps a small group or class, and you choose to invest in their lives and know them well. This is a strength of our church; we hear it time and time again. AND—there is a shadow side to this strength. Sometimes those who are newer to our community, or those who do not have an immediate group to fit in with, see and sense the depth of care that others at Calvary share, and they feel, then, isolated or alone or left out, or simply like something is wrong with them because they are not experiencing that depth of care, or that expression of commitment. We heard this in our discernment data and we pastors hear it in our offices too.

So, one invitation for us this summer might be to look for those who are seeking a caring relationship. Even if you already have a group that cares for you



and that you care for well, can you expand that circle a bit wider? Is there someone you can get to know a bit more deeply? Ask them about their interests or their journey to Calvary? And perhaps ask them how they can be cared for (rather than just caring for them the way your small group tends to care for people)?

You see, Jesus cared well for people by drawing close to them, by putting himself in close proximity to people who were very different than him: the Samaritan woman at the well who intentionally met in the middle of the day and who he had a long and in depth conversation with, or Zacchaeus the cheating tax collector who Jesus invited to come down from the tree and to whose house Jesus just up and invited himself over to for dinner.

In both cases, for Jesus, proximity precedes compassion. He draws near first, then offers care. The opportunity for caring does not come unless we are in shared space together. As Shane Claiborne, Founder of the

Simple Way says, “*None of the significant problems facing our communities can be solved from a distance.*”<sup>4</sup>

And this leads us to this powerful element of communal care and systemic care in today’s story.

Ruth goes into the fields to glean barley behind the reapers in the field of a well-off, well-known man named Boaz. Before we get into these specifics, you need understand one of the laws of Israel that had been put into place way back when.

In Leviticus 19.9-10, 23.22 and Deuteronomy 24.19-22 we read about the Levitical (priestly) Law that required farmers to leave portions of their crop for the widow, orphan and foreigner, or those in need because they lacked the customary provider in a husband, a father, or other familial ties.<sup>5</sup>

Ruth fits all three of these descriptions: she’s a widow; she’s left her family back in Moab; and as the story

<sup>4</sup> Ryan Bonfiglio, “Seeking Shalom - Session 2: Risking Proximity,” *The Candler Foundry* (19 Oct. 2022), accessed on June 2, 2024 at <https://prezi.com/view/o86uj7W4sCuo6GnJQeni/>.

<sup>5</sup> Chelsey Harmon, “Gleaning in the Field of Boaz:

Ruth 2 Commentary,” *Center for Excellence in Preaching*, accessed on June 2, 2024 at <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/chelsey-harmon/ruth-2/>.

highlights a number of times, Ruth is a Moabite, a foreigner.<sup>6</sup>

She fits the need for sure. And this is how the process to care for the poor and vulnerable worked: “The men entered the field first and cut the grain from the ground, collecting it into handfuls. When their hand was full, they dropped the bundles onto the ground which were then gathered by women who followed a distance behind them. The women ‘gleaned’ the handfuls into bundles which would then be carried off of the field. During each step of this process there would inevitably be pieces that would drop or fall out of the bundles. Instead of going through the field a second time, God says (through the Levitical law) that these crops, along with those on the very edge of the field, are to be left for the poor and the foreigner.”<sup>7</sup>

We might say this is a form of government assistance today, like food stamps or WIC. Or perhaps more aptly described like so many food banks run by non-profits. We take the canned goods we no longer want to a food bank and restaurants drop off the extra food that they cannot save or use again

tomorrow, and those who are in need ‘glean’ from our leftovers. These systems ensure that the crisis of hunger is met, but not necessarily that true satiation is met or dignity of choice in what one eats is offered.

It's important to note that this entire system is inequitable to begin with. So Boaz's disposition, while generous, must be seen in light of the power dynamic at hand – that he own land and has power over those working in his fields. It's also important to note that even as the system of communal care was in place, Boaz clearly went *over and above* in ensuring that the system was not only functioning, but also promoted dignity, choice, thriving, sustenance, and abundance. He seems to be pushing the boundaries of this system, and perhaps even creating a new system that truly reveals a different way of viewing communal care.

First, he greets the reapers with an expression of care, “*The Lord be with you;*” he sees them and gives them the dignity of greeting and blessing. Then Boaz sees a woman he has not seen before. He looks to the

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<sup>6</sup> Harmon, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Harmon, *ibid.*



margins and actually looks at the individual faces of the reapers and gleaners. He does not see them in one big lump. He inquires about a face he does not recognize – Ruth. He is told who she is, that she is a foreigner, an outsider, a widow, and instead of shoo-ing her away from his land or fields in disgust, he has compassion for her and shows deep care. He asks the young women who are gleaning to keep an eye on her and tells Ruth to stay close to them. He tells the men who are reaping to leave her alone. He invites Ruth to ask those around her for water if she is thirsty. He invites her to take a rest, a break, at mealtime, and eats with her and the other reapers—creating community at the table, inviting Ruth to eat her full, until she was ‘satisfied’ and she still had some left over.

Then, after lunch, the system of care keeps expanding, with more depth, as Boaz tells his reapers to let Ruth glean among the standing sheaves, which is to say, let her have her choice of barley. She doesn’t just have to have your leftovers at the foodbank. Give her a King Soopers gift card and allow her to shop for whatever food she

wants. And keep giving her gift cards until she has everything. Or better yet, tell the owner of the King Soopers to just let her take her cart up and down the aisles and have her fill of whatever she wants, then push it on out the door, skipping the check out line!

And then—and here’s the real kicker!—then, knowing that the reapers had already harvested the choicest barley, Boaz instructs them to pull sheaves out of the “cream of the crop” that they already have bundled and to allow Ruth to glean from those as well. He wants her to have “the good stuff.”

Ruth gleaned so much that day it was an entire ephah, which is a Hebrew unit of dry measure, equal to about a bushel or 35 liters,<sup>8</sup> or 77 pounds!—that’s enough for several weeks, not just several dinners! In just one day, Ruth and Naomi go from being in famine, to experiencing abundance, satiation, thriving, and communal care. And not just that, but Boaz says come back tomorrow and the next day and the next, until the harvest is over – glean whatever you want, whenever you want.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ephah>

We see here a model of communal care that happens on two levels. The first level is the basic systemic level of what the government or priestly ‘law’ of the day says is acceptable and right for those in need. The second level is Boaz saying that the bare minimum may be enough to survive, but not to thrive. And we see how caring for another, even for a foreigner, is given utmost importance and priority. Sure, Boaz has taken a liking to Ruth and ends up marrying her. That is part of the story.

But before we get to that part of the story, we have *this* part. Where Boaz sees Ruth, honors her personhood, gives her the dignity of choice, allows her to experience abundance, and ensures she is protected and cared for in community while working, and has a table of community to eat with after work.

Boaz’s care for Ruth, allowed Ruth to care for Naomi. It’s a ripple effect. As all of our acts of caring are. When we receive care, we’re inspired to give care.

And this brings me back to our systems of care here at Calvary. We have systems in place to ensure there are opportunities to

connect, and we are operating within those systems, and sometimes they ‘catch’ those on the margins or the outskirts or outside, and sometimes they do not. Even if they do invite those on the outside in, do our systems truly seek, with curiosity and compassion, to find out what that person needs and to seek to care for them in a way that promotes individual choice and autonomy, dignity, personhood, thriving and abundance?

Think about any system of care here at Calvary. Perhaps it’s your church school class or small group, Theology pub or Men’s Group or Youth Group. Maybe it’s your Connect 2 pairing or Congregational Care Team. Maybe it’s our Blessings ministry, or the VIP ministry. Maybe it’s a ministry you have “behind the scenes” of calling people you haven’t seen in a while or writing notes of encouragement to our community members.

Think about what is working well in that system of care that has been established at Calvary. And then, level it up a bit. Bump up the reach of care, think beyond the boundaries of that care system as they exist now—how could they be

expanded? To put it a scriptural way, how can you give that care system a Boaz-level-boost?

Or think about this: How can we allow ourselves to ‘Receive like Ruth’ in how we accept care and provision. Rather than saying, “*No, I’m fine I don’t need your help, I can just glean on the outside of the fields, don’t mind me,*” can we lean in like Ruth, can we keep it real like Ruth, can we realize the potential of *receiving care like Ruth*—of gleaning the good stuff for ourselves when we’re in need—so that we can share that care with others, just as she did with Naomi? Let me ask this again: *Can we believe, like Ruth did, that we, too, are worthy of gleaning “the good stuff?”*

Or let’s look at Naomi. She knew how to *draw near* in those one-to-one care relationships—without shame or fear! Can we *draw near like Naomi* to someone in our life who needs our care? Taking a Ruth under our wing? Keeping close?

If you don’t know where to start, just think of one relationship in your life where you want to express a deeper level of care, or where you want to tell someone more clearly and vulnerably how they can best

care for you. ‘Draw near like Naomi’ to someone else, or ‘Receive like Ruth’ in how you allow yourself to be cared for?

Then, think of one care system in your workplace or here at Calvary, or in your kids’ school or in our community, where you can invite that system of care to think a bit more generously, a bit more inclusively, a bit more radically, to create greater impact and thriving? What system of care needs a Boaz-boost?

If anyone has taught us how to do these things, Calvary, it’s Pastor Morgan. She is the ultimate Boaz-booster to care systems. Morgan has taught us all what it means to be *Open to All Closed to None* in more than just the surface level ways. Expanding our welcome through having gender inclusive restrooms, using pronouns, working on our language and leadership ethos to be more anti-racist, recognizing that people needed to know they were thought of during the pandemic and thus organizing a system where staff literally drove to every single house on our roster to deliver a sign that said “We Miss You, Thank you for being the Church!”

Likewise, you, Morgan organized the system of our Congregational Care Teams, ensuring every person in the church heard from another member, just checking in on them. Morgan, you have been the one to work with us in our Blessings ministry to ensure our care system in how we treat those in our community who might be having difficulties beyond our training or capacity can be treated with dignity and care; and you have been the one to fiercely protect our students at camp when other campers made microaggressions or said outright racist things to them. You have deepened the care system for our staff through what we have collectively read together for staff devotion and staff development and spiritual formation, and you have ensured the care of all of our children, particularly as they are free and able to express themselves in worship as the beloveds that they are. You expand care systems through how you teach and coach and serve on boards in our community, challenging us to center voices that we have failed to center. You've expanded how we care here at Calvary by hearing the need to make our restrooms more accessible and our technologies more

accessible and worked with Resource Management to make that happen. You drove to people's houses during the pandemic to show them how to access the livestream on their I-pads or how to get the Enews on their computers. And you patiently teach and re-teach the Senior Pastor how to get optimal sound for her midweek recordings. So yeah, you know how to Boaz-boost care systems well so no one is left out. And know this – your wisdom, and what you've taught us – will remain here. It is one of the lasting gifts, a legacy of your ministry that will keep bearing fruit. Why? Because you've not just done these things yourself. *You've taught us* how to ask the questions ourselves and do the work ourselves too. You've trained and equipped *us*. You've mentored us on how to draw the circle wider. This is a gift that that I treasure and am challenged by and will continue to learn from.

And you are simple THE BEST the best 'draw near like Naomi' example I know of in one-to-one relationships. I mean, come on! Who else knows exactly which Sunday mornings I need extra caffeine and comes rolling into my office with Starbucks just because? Who else texts

after a long day or a particularly big event or meeting to check in and see how I'm doing emotionally because I've just had to lead intensely and probably haven't even thought about how I'm doing? Who else drives to pick up people who want a ride to a church event? Who else is there for our youth and young adults in the middle of the night, ensuring they are safe and alive? Who else thinks to pass along pastoral care notes like, *"I noticed so and so was a bit teary in the narthex today, we might want to check in."* Who else drives dinner to members homes who are in crises and is there the next morning with bagels and coffee too? Who else is always asking, *"what do you need?"* or really, the truth is, who else 'intuits what is needed' without even having to ask?

#MorganSuperPower. Pastor Morgan, you have undoubtedly taught us what it's like to 'draw near like Naomi' to those we care for. It's the core of who you are.

And even incredibly, Morgan, even in your Enneagram Twoness, I've watched you grow over the last decade in how to 'receive like Ruth' and name and claim what you need to thrive and share in life abundant

with your community and those around you and the world you are called to make more just and equitable and healthy and whole.

In fact, it is this last trait that is the most courageous of them all, the most radically caring—not just for yourself and your family, but for the entire system of church life, here at Calvary and really in so many of our churches in this country. You naming the pace and rhythm of the pastorate as unsustainable and not just naming it, but doing something about it...is the ultimate act of courage and inspiration to me and for me. I know that 'receiving like Ruth'—gleaning the good stuff in the field when perhaps you know others are still hungry as well—will always be a growing edge for you—but hear this: *you deserve to glean the good stuff Morgan*. You are beloved and worthy of being cared for just as much as you care for others. Not because of anything you do or don't do, but just because by being human, you are worthy of thriving and health and abundance and sustenance that truly satisfies.

And not just Morgan, but *all of us, Calvary*.

We are *all* worthy of the care  
 that God showers on us. So  
 much in our world pits up  
 against one another in  
 competition or scarcity mindset.  
 But this value of caring, this  
 value that we treasure, Calvary,  
 it is deeply rooted in Christ and  
 in our Creator's desires for us.  
 And to truly see each other and  
 care for each other and allow  
 ourselves to receive care—is a  
 sign that our faith is truly  
 bearing fruit and truthfully  
 proclaiming the Good News.

So Calvary, let's do this caring  
 thing. I know we can!

Let's draw near like Naomi in  
 how we care for one another.

Let's Boaz-boost our Care  
 Systems with generosity and  
 thriving and abundance.

And let's Receive care like  
 Ruth, with vulnerability and  
 courage and dignity, gleaning  
 the good stuff and sharing it  
 abundantly with others.

And when we do, we'll truly  
 know that *Together, We are  
 Community* because *Together,  
 We Value Caring*.

Amen.