

Devotion, Week of September 21, 2025

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

Saturday, September 19, Jennifer Rohrbach and I attended the first meeting of the new East Region of our Presbytery at Stockbridge Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery has reorganized the old cluster model into four regions. There are 16 churches in our region, and all of them have membership about the size of our church except for McDonough Presbyterian. So it was nice sitting with folks from these churches, like Conyers, Gum Creek, Hemphill Memorial, Jackson, Jonesboro First, Kelley, Morrow, Smyrna, and Stockbridge to talk about how we all do church when there are only 20-30 folks in worship every Sunday.

Aisha, our Presbytery Exec, used the John 15 text on the vine and the branches to get us started in conversation. We talked about how we are all connected, even though at times we get pruned. An example of pruning is Timberridge Pres, which is, sadly, closing its doors. We all agreed that as older, smaller churches in rural/small town areas south and east of Atlanta, we are unique. We agreed to share contact information for the region and to spend time together sharing ideas, and perhaps activities. So I look forward to connecting with these churches around us.

One thing I brought up related to grapevines and their extensive branching system is one of the oldest living organisms on earth. "Pando," a quaking aspen colony in Utah, is estimated to be between 10,000 years old and possibly much older, though its exact age is difficult to pinpoint. Pando has an estimated 47,000 "stems" that appear to be individual trees but are not, because those stems are connected by one root system that spans 106 acres. As a multi-stem tree, Pando is the world's largest tree by weight and landmass. All of what we would think of as "trees" are connected by this enormous root system. Think about that. Just like all the branches on a grapevine that are connected by a common stem.

When we small churches are connected to each other, we are stronger. We can share resources and prayers and ideas. We can better withstand the storms around us that threaten our existence. We can live out our faith knowing that we have a lot to offer this world, and we have friends who are there to help us. We can be small but mighty witnesses to the Lord. Amen for these gifts that God has given us.

Jeanne