

**Make Us One, Lord, part II**  
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Last month in this space I wrote about our seemingly natural human need to classify and divide ourselves into groups. However, as Christians, our primary, common identity and purpose is in Jesus. I thought I was through with that topic until I read the newspaper yesterday.

Thomas L. Friedman is a best-selling author (“The World is Flat,” eighty-one weeks on the best-seller list) and an op-ed columnist for the New York Times. In his column on November 1 he wrote about technology: the ubiquitous iPods, Bluetooth wireless cell phones, GPS navigation systems, laptop computers, personal digital assistants, portable DVD video playback units, phones with cameras, phones with video cameras, and on and on.

Friedman writes, “Technology is dividing us as much as uniting us. Yes, technology can make the far feel near. But it can also make the near feel very far.”

When our family gets in the car for a trip to visit grandparents or friends, the iPods come out and the kids are plugged into their own private playlists, sitting inches from each other but immersed in their own music. No conversation, no interaction, no exchange of ideas.

Friedman continues, “Linda Stone, the technologist who once labeled the disease of the Internet age ‘continuous partial attention’ – two people doing six things, devoting only partial attention to each one – remarked, ‘We’re so accessible, we’re inaccessible. We can’t find the off switch on our devices or on ourselves.’”

Don’t get me wrong, I’m no technological Luddite. My techno-geek credentials are impeccable. I was an engineering major at Purdue, after all.

And historically the church has embraced technology. When the great architect Sir Christopher Wren designed London’s St. Paul’s Cathedral in the 17<sup>th</sup> century he used state-of-the-art architectural and building technology. Contemporaneously, the great pipe organs of European cathedrals used the most advanced technology of their day. And today, you could argue that projection screens in our sanctuaries are the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of 17<sup>th</sup> century stained glass.

But I think Friedman is on to something. Technology has the potential to isolate us rather than unite us.

That’s one more reason why worship is important. For an hour on Sunday morning we can put away our personal technology gadgets and together enter into holy time and space as we worship God. The key word is “together.” Corporate worship is an act – a participative act – that unites us as Christian believers. The congregation is not a passive audience, sitting in the pews waiting to be entertained by a lovely anthem from the choir or a lively sermon from the pastor, but active participants in the art of worship for which God is the audience. We sing together, we read together, we recite the creeds together, we actively listen together, we receive the sacraments together, and we give together. In worship we become one, united by the risen Christ. And giving is a key component of corporate worship. It’s one of many ways we respond to the word proclaimed in worship.

This time of year is high season for stewardship. Many churches are undertaking stewardship campaigns at this time of year. Please prayerfully consider what God is calling you to give. Remember, stewardship is not about the church’s need to receive, but about our need to give in response to God’s grace in our lives. The place to start is the Biblical standard of the tithe (giving 10% of one’s income and resources to God’s work). It sounds simple, and it is in principle, but it can be a daunting challenge if you’re not yet giving at that level. So consider a yearly increase

with the tithe as the goal. If you're giving 2.5% of your income to the church this year (the national average for United Methodists), consider upping that to 3% or 4% for next year. By stepping-up incrementally, annually, tithing is attainable. I have never met an unhappy tither. I have never met a tither whose financial life was not in order. Give it a try.

As Christians united by our oneness in Jesus Christ, let us put away anything that divides or isolates us, and wrap ourselves in the One who makes us one, in our living and in our giving.

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; [www.fumf.org](http://www.fumf.org); or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.