

“LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH EACH OTHER.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

August 14, 2022, 10:30 AM

Texts for the Sermon: Hebrews 10:19-25

Prayer:

Holy Father, this holy task of preaching is greater than any of your servants you have called to preach. Grant to me and to all of us your Holy Spirit. Open your Word to our hungry and thirsty hearts and souls. Come Holy Spirit of the living Christ. Amen.

Introduction.

For most Christians in America, church means Sunday morning worship. For a smaller percentage church may mean adding Sunday evening worship, a Sunday school class, possibly a mid-week Bible Study. In your reading of the Bible do you get a sense that NT church life could be summed up as an hour of worship. I don't think so. Churches like that become passive and dependent on a few paid professionals.

Ephesians 4:16 says the church is a body, with many members all ministering to one another in interpersonal ministry, growing and building as each part does its work.

Acts 2:46 says the early believers gathered together day after day in the Temple and house to house to break bread, study the apostle's teaching, fellowship and pray together.

This morning I will lay a Biblical foundation for small groups being a part of the ministry of church and encourage you to consider whether the Spirit might lead you to be part of one.

Our text this morning gives us a Biblical foundation for gathering in smaller groups. Every text has a context and knowing the context will help us understand the text.

The writer of Hebrews has spent 10 chapters showing how Christ is far superior to the old covenant and all the aspects of the OT rituals and worship. Christ is superior to the tabernacle and temple, He is superior to the sacrifices and offerings and He is superior to the priesthood.

Beginning with Hebrews 10:19 we come to the turning point of this sermon and its climax, the crescendo.

Hebrews 10:19-21 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Christ is the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, the high priest and the sacrifice, all at once and forever. And because of His blood, the blood of the new covenant, He accomplishes something never accomplished before and we are able to do something that couldn't be done before.

We now have the privilege of entering the Most Holy Place. Do you have any idea how big a deal this is? We can freely enter into the very presence of God at any moment because of the blood of Jesus sacrificed once and for all for us and for our salvation.

We have access to the throne room of the Father, something that the greatest of the OT saints could not do. Moses and Joshua couldn't do it, David and Solomon couldn't, Isaiah and Jeremiah couldn't. Only the high priest could and only once a year. Christ has made us all a royal priesthood.

Because of what Christ has done for us and because of what He has made possible for us, a response is called for. He has met with us so that we can meet with Him. It is this meeting with Him and the fruit of it, I want us to consider in more detail.

Hebrews 10:22-25 *Let us* draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 *Let us* hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And *let us* consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 *Let us* not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

First, let us meet together, vs. 25.

I had always considered this to be a passage that refers to Sunday morning corporate worship. That's how I have heard it preached and taught, and how I have preached and taught it myself. That is not a wrong application of this text, but it is incomplete. Beyond the obvious surface reading there are deeper implications and applications of the passage.

Does this passage say, "meet together so that the pastor can encourage you or the musicians can bless you?" Does it say, "come together to listen to a sermon so you can be encouraged?" No, it says meet together to mutually encourage one another and stir one another up to love and good deeds. That can't happen just in a gathering like this, at least not in the way the NT teaches us.

This is talking about a meeting where you and I face to face can say some things to each other that are loving, helping, faith building, encouraging and strengthening. To experience Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered, life-transforming church we need opportunities where the gifts of grace the Spirit has given each of us can be exercised mutually for the good of each other.

You all know I am a believer in preaching. It is a holy and awesome thing to proclaim the eternal Word of God. It is the power of God for salvation. But I also know that is not all we need as believers. There is much more ministry, mutual ministry that needs to happen.

You may remember the apostle Paul's comments to the elders in Ephesus about mutual ministry:

Acts 20:20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

We draw nearer to God in both worship and in fellowship with one another. Both of these kinds of gatherings are faith building and faith nurturing. Remember in Paul's letters he would write to and greet those meeting in so and so's house.

In response to what Christ has done for us and how He meets with us, He calls us to meet together. And that comes with an exhortation to not do the opposite.

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.

We all know about habits, good habits and bad habits, we all have both. Did you know that not meeting together for mutual caring can be habit-forming? Of course you did. You know as well as I do how easy it is to get in a rut and stay there. It is easy to get comfortable with our schedule and decide we really don't want to add one more thing. It is hard to get out of our comfort zones or get past our circle of familiarity. Today I am encouraging us to consider making a new habit, a habit of getting together to mutually encourage one another.

Second, let us meet with frequency and urgency, vs. 25.

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

In **II Timothy 3:1** we are warned, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days."

In **Hebrews 3:13-14** Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

One way to gain victory over sin and the deceitfulness of sin is in regular fellowship with brothers and sisters. Perseverance, growth, faith, love and victory are community projects. We don't make it to heaven alone or on our own. Good old American individualism is a threat to faith, hope and love. Notice how often our text says us and not me.

Ephesians 5:15-17, 19 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish,

but understand what the Lord's will is. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

We all know our times are troubled and challenging to our faith and spiritual life. Just walking around the fair you see a lot of darkness and lostness, people searching for acceptance and direction and meaning.

We stand firm when we stand together. In this God is glorified and we are edified, encouraged and built up in Christ.

Third, let us meet with a purpose, vss. 24-25.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...let us encourage one another.

The purpose is love in all of its expressions. Sometimes it listens, sometimes it advises, encourages, admonishes, rebukes, blesses, prays, teaches, corrects, confesses, forgives. Community is one of God's appointed means for the grace of mutual encouragement.

To do this best *consider one another*. Scripture says to consider Christ, and to consider one another, ponder their needs, pray, reflect, give thought to one another and how Christ would have you minister with your gifts to their needs. You can't consider someone well unless you know them, and you can't get to know them unless you are in a mutual relationship where trust is being formed.

And then stir things up. I like this word. This is the only place in the Bible where it is used in a positive way. It is a strong word that means stir up strife, incite a riot, provoke someone. Do you want to stir something up in church? Who wants to create a big stir? How about we incite one another to love and provoke one another to good deeds.

Titus 2:14 [Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Lets stir up that eagerness in each other.

What do you do when waters become stagnant? You stir them up to be more life-giving. What do you do when you feel spiritual stagnant? History shows time and time again one of God's favorite ways of stirring up His people to greater acts of love and good works is to draw them into smaller groups, banded together in mutual love and support, following His leading.

Jesus had a small group of 12. Each of them then went out and planted small groups of Christians as they grew and strengthened their faith.

Fourth and finally, let us meet with a center, vss. 22-23.

Hebrews 10:22-23 Let us draw near to God...²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Let us draw near to God, let us hold unswervingly to Christ who is our hope, let us encourage each other all the more as the end is approaching. This is the goal of small groups, not just social but faith building.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

I Corinthians 1:8-9 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

One of the means Jesus uses to draw us to Himself as the center of our lives is through faith-building fellowship in smaller group. Fellowship with each other deepens and strengthens our fellowship with Christ.

Illustration:

I still remember one of the strangest experiences I had in our home in OKC. Phama called me at church at about five o'clock to tell me we were having brown-outs and that she smelled something burning or overheating and that the washer and dryer no longer work. The washer was full of water and clothes but not working. By the time I got home it was apparent the refrigerator was out and the air conditioner had quit, it was 87 upstairs. But here is the most bizarre part, some of the lights worked in various parts of the house, but some didn't. All the breakers were fine. All the neighbors were fine. My house is breaking down all around me. I had never experienced anything like this, it didn't make sense.

I called a family meeting in the living room to pray for wisdom and help. Then Todd got a Bible and turned to Romans 8 about how God is at work in all things good and bad, and causes them all to work for good.

Then I called OG&E to see if there had been any reports of trouble. There hadn't been. But they sent a guy to our house. I explained our weird problems, he nodded knowingly and headed off to the back yard and instantly diagnosed the problem.

Electricity comes to our house through three wires, three legs. When one goes out, whatever in our house is fed by that line goes out and all our 220-volt appliances quit working. He strung a new line and in an hour the a/c was running and the washer and refrigerator were working. It was like a miracle.

I tell this story to make two points. Trouble always comes in this life and sometimes it is confusing, unsettling, hard to figure out and we need help. There is great comfort and power in a small group gathered in prayer. God is more glorified when He answers the prayers of several

as opposed to one. My whole family got to see God's glory in answering our prayers rather than just me going off to pray alone. Second, Todd considered the situation, went to Scripture and found a promise that would encourage me. This is the power of a small group.

The power of a church comes in two lines, our meeting together corporately in larger groups like this for worship and in smaller groups for love and mutual encouragement. If we aren't connected to both lines we will experience only half of church, we will have brown outs, and some things just won't work at all, like sharing love and strengthening each other's faith.

The elders have approved the beginning of a small groups ministry here at First CRC. You have a brochure in your boxes with lots of information about this new opportunity. We already have a number of people willing to facilitate or host a Life Group, and if you are willing to do that, please let me or Pastor Mike know. Our plan is to begin groups in mid-September.

There is tremendous flexibility to how this can happen. It doesn't matter when or where. Meet in homes, or restaurants, or where you work or at school or here at church. Meet in the morning or at lunch or in the evening. Meet together in groups of six, eight, ten, twelve, men only, women only, couples only, families with kids, weekly, bi-weekly, whatever, our aim is to be flexible, to enable as many as want to, to be a part of a group. [Kent and Becky's group]

Each time a group gathers, whether once a week or every other week, you will be given the sermon text for the following Sunday with some questions. This will enable us to begin reflecting on the upcoming worship service and sermon and come united around the same Scripture and more prepared to be blessed.

Prayerfully consider whether the Spirit is leading you to meet with the purpose of considering one another and how you can stir up love and good deeds, especially given how evil the days are and how many troubles and trials there are.

Prayerfully consider how God would have you respond. Let this fall be the time you step out, break an old habit and start a new one. Consider Life Groups as part of God's grace to you.