

Sermon Series: Life Together

Sermon Title: The Day with Others

Hebrews 10:19 – 31

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If I asked you what have been a few of the highlights - the spiritual mountain top experiences - in your life of faith, what would be the first moment or experience that comes to your mind? Picture that moment or event in your mind and notice...what do you remember about it? Perhaps you are remembering the particular place you were; maybe you remember how you felt, or what you were thinking. And I imagine that for many of you, there are specific **people** who were key to that memory.

Last week, we began exploring what “Life Together” means...what it means that our community of faith is just that - a community. Faith is not something we do in isolation. Even if our journey starts as a more individual one, as we open our hearts to Jesus, Jesus always brings others into our lives, inviting us to open our hearts to them too. Often it’s the very people we’d choose last - the folks we don’t really like, and maybe even can’t stand to be around. But God has a good sense of humor, and knows that we need them, to push us to grow in faith. In Hebrew’s 10:23-25 we read:

23 Let’s hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. 24 And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. 25 Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

Reading these verses in light of this idea that Jesus often brings into our lives people who we might not particularly want to be around, but who will push us to grow in faith, puts a new spin on “don’t stop meeting together with other believers.” I wonder, did those early disciples want to stop meeting together because they were starting to get on one another’s nerves? Did some find Peter too brash or Paul too overbearing, and decide they’d rather just do church without them?

I think of small groups that I’ve been a part of when I sometimes thought about quitting because the one woman always talked so much - too much if you ask me, and another guy was always making random comments that seemed a tangent at best and often led us down rabbit trails. There were times I thought maybe I just would be better off spending that hour reading and praying by myself. Yet, because I kept showing up, those were the very people God would use to speak a word right when I needed to hear it, and slowly, with their help, God helped me become more patient, more compassionate. And as I learned their stories, I began to truly come to love them, even as things they did were still annoying.

The passage in Hebrews speaks of our role in sparking love and good deeds in one another. When I read that verse, I also can’t help but think of the hymn I grew up singing at summer camp (and that my best friend and I would always request whenever we did a hymn sing at church). Our children’s choir has sung it here: *It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing, that’s how it is with God’s love, once you’ve experienced it, you spread that love to everyone, you want to pass it on.*

I wonder, what does it mean for you to be that spark? And what are the conditions that will allow that spark to grow into an all-consuming fire that can warm others. Or in the words of our mission statement, how can we really “love our community and invite all to discover life in Christ”?

Many translations of Hebrews 10:24 read “let us spur one another on”, but I think the translation we read is helpful “let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.” It is by **carefully considering one another** that we can begin to see and understand and encourage one another in sparking love and sharing love through good deeds.

To carefully consider, we must spend time together - eating together, worshipping together, praying together, reading Scripture together, looking for one another’s gifts and the divine spark within each other. In doing life together in these ways, we create the space, the conditions for God to use each of us to be that spark for one another. Mission is not something we do in isolation either. It is all about relationships. If you’re engaged in serving in some way, you got involved or stay involved in part because of the people.

This image from the Missional Wisdom Foundation shows what this can look like in balance. As we seek to discover life together in Christ, our loving God and our loving neighbor, our filling up and pouring out are rhythms that are as critical and natural as breathing in and breathing out.

We start in different places. For some of us, we come to serve in some way after we come to faith, and begin being formed in a community of faith. But for some of us, the opposite is true. Some of us start by serving together - maybe we go on a mission trip not so much because of our faith, but because we want to make a difference, but in the midst of it, we find ourselves wanting to learn more, because the community we’ve experienced with this group of Christians compels us. But as we grow in faith, we see that we need all four parts - places to love God in worship and places to share God’s love with others; times of serving others, and times of humbly receiving. In these, we come to realize that we all have much to give and much we need to receive. As we practice our faith in these ways, especially as we do this walking with those who we consider are in some way not like ourselves, we move towards the unity that Christ prayed for when he said make them one, as I and the Father are one.

Here on this Mission Celebration Sunday, I’ll close with a challenge: for you to stretch yourselves so that God can fan the flame of your faith. If you’re not already in a community group or small group, talk to me or one of our other pastors about how to get connected. If you are in a small group, or as you form one, find ways of listening to others that are in some way not like you...what do they care about, what’s their journey of faith or experience of God/church been like? Listen for what God will reveal to you when, with an open heart and mind, you read the Bible and pray together with someone with different political opinions, different racial identity, or different economic status. You will perhaps be surprised how listening together for the heart of God will spark love and opportunities to stand together and even serve together.

Take one of our Connect & Commit Guides at the back of the Sanctuary/gym and pray for our mission partners. If you aren’t already involved with a ministry or mission, look through the second half of the guide and listen for the Spirit’s nudge as to how God might use you in the year to come - how you can serve and be that spark of God’s love through your words and actions, but also how you can be transformed as you receive that spark from those you went to serve.