

3Rs: Reintegration * Hebrews 10:19-25

September 25, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning we are going to look at the second of our three R's and that's reintegration, the process of bringing scattered people back together into a unity. And there are two questions that I want us to think about today as we think together about the idea of reintegration:

1. How do we reintegrate as a church, in the aftermath COVID-19? And
2. What do we do when we're back together? What is the goal that we focus all of our attention on?

Here's why I'm asking these questions. By and large, I think that the core of Langford has done a really great job hanging together as a church. I'm very proud of you. Right off the bat, you figured out how to get online for Zoom and week in and week out for two years now, you've been faithfully attending, online and in-person. I'm really proud of the way we've weathered the pandemic.

But let's be honest. We're missing some people. We're not all back together the way we were before the pandemic.

Now listen – that's not to say that joining us online is bad – if I thought it was, I wouldn't go to the trouble of making it possible – but I think that it's important to be here in person, if you can be here in person. If it's hard for you to get around, then by all means, please, join us on Zoom, and thank you for making church a priority in your life. But even then, the question remains: how do we reintegrate as a church, even when we're not all in the same building?

That's the first question and the second question is this: what do we do when we're back together? What is it that we give our time and energy and resources to? We have a limited number of hours in the day and dollars in the bank – what do we spend those precious resources doing?

To help us to answer those questions, I want to look with you at a passage of Scripture in Hebrews 10, starting in verse 19. Join me in Hebrews 10; it's the last big book at the back of the Bible before Revelation and we're going to look at chapter 10. Hebrews 10, starting in verse 19.

19 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,
22 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.

Now as you might imagine, given that this book is called 'Hebrews,' it was written first and foremost for Hebrew people. And this passage very much reflects an ancient Hebrew worldview. In ancient Israel, you had a priest who interceded for you on your behalf. And you had a high priest who could go into the Most Holy Place, the very presence of God, but only with sacrifices, and only then once a year. The priest, the high priest, they could make sacrifices to cleanse you from guilt, but they could never guarantee it and they could never get you to close God. Despite all that religious activity, you'd never really know or have confidence in God.

The book of Hebrews though says 'look, now, we have a great high priest – a high priest who is greater than any high priest who came before – and His name is Jesus. And while other high priests offered

animals to atone for sin, our great high priest gave himself to enable us to come into the very presence of God. His death, in His body, on the Cross opened the way for us to come to God. And we – who were once so sullied by sin that we could never approach God – we can have confidence to come right into the God’s presence because Jesus’ blood has cleansed us from all guilt and shame.

Now that’s a huge paradigm shift, isn’t it? It’s a bit like this. Up until this year, I’ve been using the same lawn mower that I bought when Julie and I first had a lawn to cut. It was this super basic, corded lawn mower that had back wheels that refused to stay on. So every time I cut the grass, I had to screw them back on and then stop and tighten them halfway through. It got the job done, but it was a pain. Then finally the handles broke and I duct taped them back together and then I finally said – forget it. I’m getting a brand new lawnmower, not the kind you gotta plug into the wall and carry the cord around, not the kind you gotta tighten the bolts every time you use it – a brand new lawnmower. And I’ll tell you what – it’s practically fun cutting my lawn now! This thing is smooth, I can go where I want, I don’t have to carry a cord around. It’s great! It makes the old one obsolete.

And that’s how it was with Jesus and the priesthood. The Israelite priests were getting the job done but only mostly and only temporarily; Jesus came along and made them obsolete.ⁱ Jesus laid down His life, once for all, for the forgiveness of sin so we wouldn’t have to be constantly wondering – am I right with God? Jesus made us right with God.

Given that privileged reality, what do you do? Given the incredible gift that this represents, how do you respond? Well the book of Hebrews gives us four answers.

1st. You draw near to God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith. That’s verse 22. In light of the reality that Jesus is our high priest who opens for us the way to God, we go right in, and dig into relationship with God. And we do that with a sincere heart or a true heart your Bible might say. What does that mean? I think it means we give God our undivided attention. We clear out the distractions in our hearts that cause us to lose sight of God. Every so often, Julie will say ‘Are you paying attention to me?’ God says the same and we can give Him our full attention when we push the distractions aside and go to Him with a steadfast heart, fully assured in our belief in Him. That’s the first thing Hebrews says to do.

2nd. You hold unswervingly to your faith in Him. That’s verse 23 - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. There are lots of things that can tempt our eyes and hearts away from God, lots of things that attempt to knock us off course and say ‘I give up’ but this verse says – ‘Hold on steadily to God, no matter what. Our great high priest has promised not only to be with us in this life but also to the next, and he’s going to keep that promise so hold unswervingly to the hope you profess.’

3rd. You consider how you may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. That’s verse 24
24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Now notice here, the book of Hebrews takes us from the realm of individual responses to the grace of God to corporate ones. ‘Draw near to God with a sincere heart, hold unswervingly to your faith in Him.’ Those are all things that have to do with our personal, inner life of faith. But verse 24 shows us that faith in God is not just a personal, inner life thing – it’s a corporate, community-oriented thing too.

Verse 24 literally says ‘fix your thoughts’ on how you may spur one another to love and good deeds. Make every effort to consider how you can inspire your fellow believers to gracious actions. Just think about that for a minute. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you have a responsibility to build into the life of the person sitting next to you. (Say hi, don’t be shy). As John Piper puts it: ‘Focus on helping others become loving people.’ⁱⁱ One of the main ways that we respond to our Great High Priest is by spurring each other on to love and good deeds.

And that’s why our final action point/response is vital – 4th - we keep on meeting together, no matter what. That’s verse 25 -

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.

One of the most important things that you can do in response to the grace of God is to meet together with other believers – and this verse and the previous one tell us why – so that we can encourage one another in love and good deeds. Church is not just about the pastor teaching the people; church is about the people building each other up.

And it’s really interesting to see that even in the first generation of Christians, people needed the reminder to make church a priority. Apparently sleeping in on Sunday morning is not a strictly modern phenomenon. The author of Hebrews thought it was a big enough problem that he had to write it into the Bible. Now, to be fair, for the people HE was talking to, they may have been neglecting meeting together because meeting together could be dangerous and even illegal depending on the time and place, but even so, the book of Hebrews says – let us not neglect meeting together, no matter the cost, because Jesus is coming soon.

Given that we have a great high priest then who freely brings us into the very presence of God, the book of Hebrews says –

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

23 Let us hold unswervingly 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. (Heb 10:25 NIV).

That’s Hebrews 10:19-25; let’s think about how that helps us to answer our questions – how do we reintegrate as a church and what we do when we’re together?

First, how do we reintegrate as a church? Before we answer that question, maybe we need to answer an even more fundamental question – how important is it that we come to church? You only have so many hours off over the weekend; why should you give a couple of those to coming to church?

Well, what does the book of Hebrews say? You have a great high priest who has restored you to God and cleared the way for you to fellowship with Him; dig into your relationship with Him! Invest in your relationship with God and not just as an individual, but together with other believers, encouraging one another one to love as good deeds. To do that, you need to meet with other believers.

It struck me this week; for the people that this was originally written before (and for some people in some places today), going to church was taking your life into your hands; we just take a lovely Sunday drive down Hwy 2 to get here. Or tune in on Zoom. Is it important to come to church? Yes, it is, but not just to hear me talk.

Because: look again at verses 24 and 25 – ‘let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.’ And verse 25 – ‘let us encourage one another.’ See, this is why coming to church is so important – ideally, ‘church’ is not the pastor filling everybody up; ‘church’ is everybody building each other up.

Charles Stanley writes:

‘In the atmosphere, worship, and fellowship in God’s house, we discover that we are not alone. We hear others talk about how the Lord has miraculously provided for them. One may describe the pain he has suffered as a result of a loss. A new believer may tell her story of redemption, rejoicing in God’s grace. As we listen to others recount God’s work in their lives, something happens inside of us. We are spurred on to faithfulness and to praising God for His goodness...’

I don’t know about you but I can totally identify with that. I can count on one hand the number of sermons that I remember really impacting my life, but there is no shortage of moments where I can remember someone spontaneously building into me, maybe without even knowing it. Moments when after church, someone cared enough to listen to what was going on in my life and share a verse with me to encourage me. Moments when someone shared some lesson they learned in their devotional learning or some insight from a Christian book they were reading. Moments when people prayed for me or otherwise spoke into my life. Those are the unplanned moments that make church so important, moments when ‘iron sharpens iron,’ as Proverbs 27:17 says.ⁱⁱⁱ

So as we think about coming back together as the church, I would encourage you – don’t just come back to be built up; come back to build others up too. Think long and hard about how to spur one another to love and good deeds. And you know what? I’m not even sure that that means figuring out ways to persuade or guilt trip people into doing nice things; I really think it’s just a matter to doing loving things yourself and letting those spur others to good deeds.

Just thinking about it, I think that probably the times when I’ve been spurred on to love and good deeds is when I’ve seen someone else loving and doing good deeds. They share some gracious thing they’ve done and I think ‘I could do that too!’ Seeing someone else being caring inspires you to be caring, so be the first domino is a series of loving actions. If you want some very practical ways to spur each other to love and good deeds, I’ve included a handout with some suggestions I found online.

And I think that this is really important for people who are joining us online. I’m glad that you are joining us this way, and I’d delighted to see you on Zoom, but the reality is, you end up missing out on those spontaneous, interpersonal interactions that are crucial for the life of faith. But listen, who says you can’t have those at home? Immediately after church, give somebody you saw online a call. See how they are? Ask what they learned from the Scripture. See how you can pray for them. Even if you’re not here, you can still spur each to love and good deeds.

So how do we reintegrate as a church, post-COVID? Well, I think it's as simple as committing to making church a priority. Not neglecting meeting together but responding to our great high priest together as a family.

What do we do when we're together?

Well, we draw near to God with a sincere heart and we encourage one another to love and good deeds. In other words, 'we come to church to be the church.'

We don't come to church to be a kind of Optimist Club, we don't even come to church to be a benevolent society; we come to church to be THE CHURCH and do what THE CHURCH alone can do - to draw near to God together, to hold unswervingly to our faith together, to encourage one another to live out that faith in our everyday lives, even when we're not together. That's what it means to be the church.

I really hope that we will unite, not just around the idea of me doing ministry, but of the church doing ministry, one person to the next, you doing loving things and so spurring each other on to other loving deeds.

You know, in a bigger church or a younger church, I would say maybe this is a call for us to start some sort of outreach ministry, like a soup kitchen or a tutoring program or something. Given our population though, I'm not sure that makes sense, but what I would love to see is every day, each and every one of us drawing near to God, communing with Him through prayer and Bible reading, listening to and responding to what He has to say and then acting on it in our own lives. Then, together, as a church, we sense where God is leading, and let the ministry of the church grow from the grassroots up instead of me saying 'here's what to do.' If the spiritual weight of this church lies solely on my shoulders, then it is going to collapse. But if each of us invest in our relationship with God, grow in our relationship with God, there's no telling what we can do together as the church. As we come back together, let's focus on being the church and building each other up in love. Come to church to be the church.

As we close, I just want to share with you an email that I got a few weeks back because it captures the message at the heart of this sermon – it says:

“As church attendance numbers fade across the nation and online services become very convenient it's important to remember why church attendance for you and your family matters so much. You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have community of faith on your sofa. You can't experience the power of a room full of believers worshipping together on your sofa.

Christians aren't consumers. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We pray by laying hands on the hurting. We do life together. The church needs you. And you need the church.”

ⁱ See just before our passage at Hebrews 10:1-14, esp. 2-4, 14.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/consider-each-other-how-to-stir-up-love>

ⁱⁱⁱ 17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Pro 27:17 NIV).