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Connect: Love

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

(Slide 1: Connect: Love)

My Sister-in-Law lost 100 pounds with a popular weight loss program. Wow! What an achievement! She exercised, ate healthier, ate less, persevered for over a year, and attended weekly support meetings. So when I was still struggling with losing the baby weight 4 years after having my daughter, I realized that if I wanted the results that she had, maybe I should try doing what she did. So I signed up for the program.

I exercised, ate healthier, ate less, persevered and attended weekly support meetings. And I lost weight. Eventually, what I realized was that weight loss is not rocket science it's just math. To lose weight you need to eat fewer calories than you burn -- it's that simple. Weight loss is not complicated, but it is hard. It's hard because we live in a culture where we are constantly surrounded by bad health choices.

The purpose of the weekly support meetings was not to learn the weight loss program -- you learn everything you need to know in one 20 minute introductory session!

(slide 2: support meetings for counter-cultural living)

The purpose of the weekly meetings was to encourage one another to keep doing a very counter cultural thing, when everyone is telling you to just let it slide, just this once. The meetings were to remind one another, every week, that the long term benefits of better health, cuter clothes, more energy, and so on... are worth it when it would be so much easier to sleep in instead of exercising and eat whatever you want.

But meetings take time.

Meetings have annoying people in them.

Meeting can get boring.

I didn't have any more questions. I already knew how to do this -- I mean, weight loss is just simple math.

So I drifted away.

And I regained the weight, even though I knew how not to.

Because knowing how isn't the hard part. The hard part is doing what you know is right when you are surrounded by a culture that is constantly egging you on to do what you know is wrong.

In our reading today the author of Hebrews is writing to a community of second or later generation Christians, possibly in or near Rome who were well grounded in the Hebrew Bible. (Marcus Borg, *Evolution of the Word*) These people were smart, well studied, and had likely been raised in an established church community. They knew how to be Christians, after all, Christianity is simple -- love God and love your neighbor. (Mk 12:30-31; Mt 22: 38-40; Lk 10:27)!

And since our faith is simple, they began to wonder why they should bother working at it anymore.

Why do we need to keep going over this same message over and over again?

Why do we need to keep coming to church every week?

Love God, love your neighbor -- we get it! We got it! We're good!

And the writer of Hebrews responds, yes. You get it, you've got it, you are good! Now keep going.

Christianity isn't complicated, but it is hard. It's hard because we live in a culture where we are constantly surrounded by a different message.

- A culture that encourages us to love things and use people.
- A culture that worships power instead of God.
- A culture that tells us day in and day out that nothing and no one is ever good enough, so you better buy something to improve yourself.
- A culture that denies the essential value, the essential *belovedness,* of each and every person and reduces the purpose of our lives to being cogs in the great economic machine.
- A culture that tells us that God is a delusion and our neighbors are a threat.

It's hard to keep going at loving God and loving our neighbors in a world that really doesn't support that.

So the author of Hebrews writes,

“Don't give up meeting together as some have done,” (Heb 10:25) because in a world that is ruled by power and profit, it's deeply counter cultural to live by the Rule of Love.

(Slide 3: “let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,” (Hebrews 10: 24-25))

- So we need “to provoke one another to love and good deeds,” (Heb 10:24 NRSV)
- We need “to spur one another on” to do the will of God (NIV)
- We need to “motivate” (New Living Translation) one another to value people more than profits
- We need to “stir up” (English Standard Version) one another to get organized and care for the “least of these” (Mt 25:40).
- We need to “excite” (Webster's Bible Translation) one another about living this counter-cultural, transformational, way of life that is the practice of Christian faith.

Sometimes people will tell me, “I don’t have to go to church to believe in God.”

And I respond, “you’re right.”

You don’t need to go to church to intellectually assent to the existence of God or to read the Bible or understand the gospel message. Christianity is simple -- love God and love your neighbor.

But Christianity isn’t really about what we know or think about God.

Christianity is about how we live.

(Slide 4: Christianity is about how we live... the rule of love)

If I can’t manage to stay on a diet without support. If I can’t manage to live one small part of my life in a counter-cultural way without weekly encouragement...

How on earth can I possibly live every aspect of my life in a counter-cultural way without weekly support?

Because living every part of my life in a counter-cultural way

How I spend my time

How I spend my money

How I relate to other people

-- living by the Rule of Love instead of the rules of profit and power is exactly what it means to be a Christian.

There are days, to be honest, there have been months and even years in my life, when I was tired of church.

I was tired of being the youngest person in the room at every meeting...

And feeling like I had walked through a time machine to 1968 every time I walked in the door.

I was tired of the same old story every Christmas and Easter.

I was tired of putting up with annoying people.

I was bored with bible studies that were shallow or too basic.

And impatient with an institution that seemed to be all talk and no social action!

But I can't give up give up meeting together because:

Your love reminds me to be loving.

Your generosity reminds me to love my needy neighbor generously.

Your forgiveness reminds me to forgive.

Being cared for, by you, reminds me to care for others.

As flawed and frustrating as church can be sometimes, I can't give up meeting together because Church has as it's mission the counter-cultural Rule of Love.

And I want to be a part of a world where love rules.

Where every child is cared for and housed and fed and loved.

Where every adult lives with purpose and passion and love.

Where our household budgets, our city budgets, our corporate budgets, our national budgets, are geared towards the common good instead of common greed.

I want to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus described it...

And I can't do it alone.

(Slide 5: “let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,” (Hebrews 10: 24-25))

So , “let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,” (Heb 10: 24-25) to love God and love our neighbors.

Children's Message: Stronger Together

Have kids form pairs and sit on the floor, back-to-back, with their arms folded across their chests. On go, have kids attempt to stand up together without using their arms. Kids will quickly discover that the task is difficult unless they work together to succeed.