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Oak Grove UMC
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The Mission: Meet Together

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: The Mission: Meet Together)

Throughout this month we're focusing on the Mission of the Church. We do a lot of great ministry here at Oak Grove. So much that sometimes we can get caught up in doing and doing and doing, and kind of lose sight of what God is really calling us to do and be here and now. At the beginning of the summer I called together a small group to take a look at all the things we do as a church and categorize them into Ministry Areas so that we could work together more effectively. We asked the question, "what are the BIG biblical ideas that describe the essential work of the church?"

Here's what we came up with:

(Slide 2: House graphic)

Love God. Based on Deuteronomy 6: 5

Love One Another. Based on John 13:34

Meet Together. Based on Hebrews 10:24-25

Reach Out to care for the least of these. Based on Matthew 25:40

Good Stewards. Based on 1 Peter 4:10

Essentially, the mission of the Church is love.

Loving God,
loving one another,
meeting together to stay focused on love,
Reaching out to love our neighbors through service and
being good stewards of the resources God has provided us so that we can
love all the more.

This week's focus is: Meet Together Based Hebrews 10:24 -25

(Slide 3: “And 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, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24 -25))

“And 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, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Christianity can really only be practiced in community.
Academic introverts far smarter than me have spent, literally centuries, trying to figure out how to get around this whole pesky needing to be in community in order to be a Christ-follower” thing. And, my fellow introverts, I'm sorry – there really is no way to be a Christian all by yourself...

You can read the Bible by yourself.
You can *believe* in God all by yourself.
You can *kind of* Love God by yourself, except that how God wants us to show our love for God is by loving our neighbors.
And since love is an action, not just an amorphous bit of heartburn in our chests, you kinda' have to interact with people in order to do the work of loving them.

My fellow introverts, there's just no getting out of it. In order to love your neighbor, you must be a neighbor.

Doesn't it seem like we're always trying to come up with an excuse not to meet?

The Jewish ethnic church in Rome to whom the book of Hebrews was written was dealing with some of the same issues with meeting that we have today. (Marcus Borg, *Evolution of the Word*)

- They were busy working to survive – so are we!
- They lived in a larger culture that, at best, didn't support, and at worst, actively opposed their faith – we can relate to that too!
- And they seemed a little frustrated with church. I mean, Christianity is simple – love God and love your neighbor. How many times do we need to go over this?
 - So can't we just be loving to whatever neighbors we encounter in our busy lives and call it good?

I don't think we can.

And I know I can't.

I'm waaay too good at coming up with excuses to justify my selfishness.

I need my church, I need *you* to provoke me to love and good deeds, so that I will stop *agreeing* that caring for the least of these is a good idea and start actually caring.

I need the encouragement of fellow Christians when life is hard. When I'm clinging to the hope that God will make a way where there is no way that I can see.

I *know* a fair amount about God, but I see God and I hear God most often through you.

- I hear God in the things that you say that I needed to hear.
- I feel God's presence in your help and care for me when I need it.
- I know God in bigger and deeper ways through your questions and the faith and questions of our children.

This is why Meeting Together is a core value of our mission.

(Slide 4: Meet together house portion)

And here's some of the ways we meet together here.

Sunday School, Messy Church, Youth Group, confirmation, Church Camp – these are ways in which we relate with our children and youth.

We share bible stories, we do fun activities, but the goal is not to memorize the books of the bible or to master the craft of paper-mache, --our goal is to raise our children to be disciples of Jesus Christ who make the world, and their own lives, better by loving God and loving their neighbors.

And they learn that love in relationships. Relationships with one another and with adults who share their faith journey with them.

We also have Small groups, adult classes, membership classes –

- these are our opportunities to engage with one another's questions,
- to get to know one another more deeply and support one another in the ups and downs of life
- and to provoke one another to love and good deeds

All by myself, the problems of the world seem massive and impossible for me to do anything about.

But when a handful of us gather together, and we cooperate with God, pretty soon we're doing some pretty amazing things together.

And then meeting together starts to overlap with loving God and loving our neighbors and reaching out to care for the least of these and practicing good stewardship... because that's just what we do when we meet together.

(Slide 5:

So I'm asking you, this week, to make time in your busy life to meet together.

1. Come to a town hall tonight at 4:30 or tomorrow at 1pm to share what you have begun to discern with God about love and good deeds you feel provoked to do in the next year.
2. Also, continue to pray. Pray for understanding about what God wants us to do together, here and now -- and pray for discernment in our own lives because what we do together is really an outgrowth of our individual callings.
3. And, Allow yourself to be provoked or encouraged to do the work of love and good deeds that God is calling you into and that God is calling us into together.