

Brentview Baptist Church

'The Connecting Church'

Don't Take the Journey Alone

Pastor Dave Spate

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When you came in this morning you were handed a marble. As you held it in your hand I wonder if it brought memories of playing with marbles as a kid. Marbles are neat things, they are beautiful, and like the Caramilk bars, I always wonder how they get the colour inside them. I gave you the marble because I have heard numerous people use the image of a bag of marbles to describe what happens in some churches on a Sunday morning. When you place marbles in a bag, you can hear them banging into each other, ricocheting off of one another. But when you take them out of the bag (like a friend I had as a kid) and set them in rows, while they may look pretty sitting beside one another they don't make an impact on each other. When Christians act like marbles, they get together, sit in rows all facing the same way and if they don't take time to get to know each other, it is easy to leave church exactly the same as when we arrived.

An alternate view of Christian community can be pictured with a bag of grapes. For when you place grapes together in a bag and apply a little pressure the grapes break open and all their flavors begin to mix together and something flows from that interaction which is sweet and a joy to partake in.

The problem is that we live in a society that can create a marble mentality. We are told that we are to look out for #1, that the more we own, the more we value what we have, and the key to getting ahead is that we need to work very hard. The result is that the demands of the job and the whispers of society which holds business as one of our highest goals, creates people who when asked 'how are you?' Answer with pride and exhaustion 'I am very busy'. That busyness and the pace we run at often result in our jettisoning friends, pulling back from relationships and it is not long until we end up feeling very alone. The problem is, we were 'formed to want family' our hearts were made for community. And as we learned last week, as we looked at that little Italian immigrant town in the Pennsylvania called 'Roseto' we were never meant to take this journey of life alone. For as we found last week, to amazement of the researcher, they found that despite the fact that this Italian community loved it's wine and their sausages cooked in lard that their heart attacks ratio was ½ of anywhere else in the US, and they have only a 1/3 of the medical issues the town of Bangor had, which was only 6 miles away. After checking the water, their working conditions and their life style, the researchers came to a one line conclusion, which was that people are nourished by other people when they are in true community.

That shouldn't surprise us, for the New Testament teaches that when you and I have an authentic community in which we are involved, where true friendships exists, it is not only good for our emotional life and our spiritual life, but it is also good for our health.

That is why we spoke last week about how crucial it is to make sure that those who are in our inner circle of friendship (that group of key friends) are the kind of people who will help us reach our goals, help us develop a deeper faith and keep us from going across the guardrails that will cause us harm. For we know that once a person is our friend, we become the most open to their influence and that is why we need to choose that inner circle of our friendship carefully. But let's be realistic, we live in a society which due to busyness and pressures make us so busy that even we who have faith can easily become 'marbleized' (made up the word myself: Means 'to become like marbles' cold, untouched by others and alone). However, right beside that reality, inside us something else is growing, and that is why we crave real friendship and we know we need it. So there is this tug a war going on in our heads as Christians, where we hate to be alone, know it isn't good for us but can't seem to get to that place of community we crave.

Grab your bibles and turn to (Hebrews 10:24-25) It is one of those verses you appreciate, tap dance around and often don't like. But let's unpack it a bit, I hope in a helpful way. (Hebrews 10:4-25)

(Hebrews 10:19-23) Here Paul is saying that something amazing has happened. We, like so few in the world don't need to be afraid of God. With confidence, in prayer, we can instantly enter the Holy place where God lives. Why? Because Jesus, by his blood, has cut a trail from our hearts to the very heart of God, and when we arrive in God's throne room standing right there, is Jesus who helps us articulate what we need to speak of God. (Men, wouldn't it be great if when you want to explain something to your wife in the middle of an argument, if you had a translator to help you use the right words to explain what you are thinking, so the words you use wouldn't get you in trouble?). Jesus does that for us as we speak to God through prayer. (Vs. 22) 'So let us draw near to God with assurance and faith' and (Vs. 23) says 'Let us hold unswervingly the hope we profess.' Here Paul is saying 'Don't miss the wonder of what we have, we have direct access to God, we have Jesus as our word smith, we have a hope that with God all things are possible because we have a real relationship with God, we are the friends of God.

Now look at (Vs. 24) I think the text should add, so because of that, let us consider the following ideas that I want to give you. He is saying that because you and I are believers and have this amazing privilege of being a friend of God we need to consider this 'Don't fluff these ideas off, don't say 'oh it is just the minister trying to keep his numbers up in church'. These are words that God is giving you. And if you call yourself a Christ Follower and want the benefits he gives you, then you and I need to think long and hard before we throw away how he has made us as a person and how he has designed you to thrive as a Christian. Now here are his three Suggestions:

I. Consider... Community is necessary for it changes our way of thinking, it makes us begin to put others first

The very first thing Paul speaks about here is this 'Oh by the way, despite all you have been given by God himself, it isn't all about you.' I say that because when we see how much God has given us, it is easy to let it re-in-force the line we hear so often in commercials 'Well, it's because you deserve it". Yes, a part of faith is that God died for you, sought you out, sent his Holy Spirit to soften your hear, he has done so much because he loves you as an individual. I watch people twist the wonderful love of God to a place where they seem to feel that the Universe and especially their church need to revolve around them and their needs. So they come to a church expecting that the preaching, the worship and the programs should be such that they will really feel good here and have their every need met. If they aren't met then they will just go to another church which will 'serve them better'.

Jesus says 'You have it all wrong; your first task here is to look around and see how you can spur someone else along in their walk with the Lord'. Why? Because what God knows is that as we care for others something amazing happens in our lives, we grow friendship connections and we grow in depth as Christians. The more you work with people, the more you will realize you need Jesus to help you along the way. It says our job as we come to church or are a part of a small group or part of B-true ministries or Women Together needs to be that on the way to the program you and I start asking how could I 'spur others along toward love and good deeds?'. We are from Calgary, we know what "spur along means" it is giving a little prod so that the horse will pick up speed and go in the right direction. What is the direction it is moving toward? It is to increase our love and good deeds for others. How would the marriages or relationships with your kids change if in your Small Group (small group of friends) you determined that when you heard them speak about their spouse or their kids that you would try and help each other get creative in how to care for them in a loving way?

Or if part of your reason to hang together with another couple, single mom or co-worker was to keep in the back of your mind, that our friendship can be used of God to make good deeds (good things) happen to those around you? Let me give you an example, Diane Tachuck is part of our Small Group and we have been struggling due to busyness just getting together on a regular basis. We all have very busy schedules and despite the fact that it is a wonderful small group with great people in it, it has been hard to regularly attend. So Diane started to email all of us and when that didn't work she began phoning us and then she set aside her home and we finally got together and have a plan again to make it work, she 'considered' long and hard how she would spur us along (prod us and poke us) until we connected, for she knew that as we connected it would cause us (in the middle of our business) to keep pushing toward loving actions and good deeds.

She put us ahead of herself, for our sake. Let me throw out a challenge to you concerning good deeds. This December we are going to set aside the whole month around one topic, 'generosity' because how generous God has been in the sending of Jesus we want to be generous to others. The problem is that in order to be generous around Christmas we need to start some of the projects right now. So can I ask you, with your family, will you consider getting involved in Operation Christmas Child?

It is the idea of filling a shoe box with toys, school supplies and hygiene items and then Samaritans Purse will add a simple message that God and Christians care about them. I know of a lady from our church who prepares 1 box for every year she has been alive, as a way to say thanks for God's goodness in her life. You see we want to spur each other along to good deeds. So take a box, and we are going to stack them in front of the Impact board, they need to be back here by November 27th.

Quick comment: This year of Impact we are going to throw lots of ideas your way of how you can make an impact, so that as you get involved in a few ministries and projects, you can find that place you are called to minister. On Tuesday night we had a great banquet around where we focused on the ministry of International Justice ministry whose task it is to legally free boys and especially girls out of slavery and prostitution. For God wants to not only free those who are being abused (often, after they no longer produce revenue, they discard them or kill them) but also throw the scoundrels in jail who are making the road dangerous for future kids. At the banquet a young man (who had been part of the pre-marital workshops we do) told of how his heart was broken by what he heard a while ago. That now his area of service is taking care of any Justice Ministry speaker as they come to Calgary. He is learning the first point, which is a call to love and good deeds needed to define us as Christians

Interview Laura Leffelaar & Lindsey Schindel (Sorry if it's spelt wrong)

2. Consider... Community is necessary for your own Care

I saw a sermon the other day on this verse that was entitled 'Why you need to be in church every Sunday.' Can I be very clear, this verse is not saying that 'if you show up in church every week you are a good Christian and if you don't show up in church every week, that you aren't a good Christian', why? because the location of your body on a Sunday morning doesn't determine your spiritual condition. I need to add that I have precious friends, who after being very involved in church life have backed away because they can't find a church that 'conforms to their idea' of what a church should be like. I know of folks who became too busy and got out of the habit of church and developed new habits like sleeping in, cottage or more work and while they claim to have faith, they never come to church.

Can I go back to a simple thing I said before? If we are a follower of Jesus and he tells us that we need to stay regularly involved in a community of believers (to the point of making it a habit) and we don't do it. Then we have to ask ourselves some hard questions about how real and near our walk with Him. I also know of people who have drifted from the church who say that the reason they don't attend any more is because of how they have been hurt by someone at their former church. And while some of that is just an excuse, I know that people have been hurt because they were criticized about what they wore, for sitting in someone else's pew, for not following someone's favorite pet theology and in many churches something that was said concerning the church kitchen. I think we need to remember that this needs to be a place where everyone feels at home, welcomed and where we believe that if someone comes here it is because they desire to move toward God. The last thing I want to hear is when I stand before God is that what I said and caused someone and their children to step back from meeting Jesus. This needs to be holy ground and safe ground.

You have heard me say that we need to be as regular as possible in our attendance on Sunday or our Small groups because you never know when the word for that day will be for us, or we will need to give a word of encouragement to those who we will meet. Let's be true to what the passage says, remember the historical situation which the readers of Hebrews (which I believe were the church in Jerusalem) were in. This letter was circulated just a few years before Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans and almost leveled. In other words this letter was written just before a huge change was about to hit the Jerusalem church and the individuals within the church. So what God was doing was saying 'Make sure you grow in depth as friends who share faith because soon you will need those friendships to carry you through'. God knowing what was about to happen next in their lives (Vs. 25) the reference to 'the day' that was coming, was calling them to develop the kind of friendship that would be there when they needed it most.

That is why the habit, him calling them to, is not simply church attendance; it is the habit of staying engaged with one another as friends who together share a growing faith. So remember the word we began with, can I ask you to consider making sure you are connected with others who share faith on an ever deepening way, because all of us know from experience that all of us go through times when we had better have deep friends around us and we know that there will be other times when the things we learned as we went through tough times will be exactly what others will need to help them not just survive but thrive during tough times.

III. Consider... Community is necessary for encouraging one another

Here comes Paul's bottom line, what should happen as we get together on Sunday in a Small group or as we serve together in some ministry is that we encourage one another. To encourage means to pour courage into someone else. It is literally to help comfort one another. Now, here is where it gets really interesting, the word used here for encouragement is the exact Greek word used by other places to describe the job of the Holy Spirit. He is referred to as the comforter. Now don't miss this, if you are filled with the Holy Spirit (if He lives inside of you) it only makes sense that His encouragement should flow out of you to others, that as we show up to an event (meet a friend who is going through tough stuff) that the Holy Spirit should be able to use us and our words to pour courage and hope into those around us.

We can be life changers because we bring the Holy Spirit and comfort with us, but I need to also add that if that isn't happening we need to go back to God and ask the Holy Spirit to deal with what is within us, that is stopping that comfort from flowing through us. That means that for example, if you are in our Early bird Bible Study, the Men's Friday Breakfast club, our Women's book club or our B-true Small Groups, the small group I am attending and it isn't a place where people aren't being encouraged and God isn't lifted up. Then we need to ask the Holy Spirit to do a work within us so that these places become God's places to encourage hearts.

Why? The verse ends by saying the 'day is approaching' it could be referring to a day of persecution, the rapture, or a time when those within that group (or those who yet need to join

that group) will need to feel the encouragement of Christ from you. Please consider that God filled you with his Holy Spirit so you could bring encouragement to others.

Many of you, who are sports fans, know the story of Jackie Robinson who was the first African American to play baseball. He was a great player and the first to break the color barrier. However, one day while playing in Brooklyn stadium he committed an error. The fans started to boo him and as he stood there at second base, head hanging down, it got nasty as people started to throw things. And then Pee Wee Reese the short stop walked over and put his arm around his shoulders. Reese was a white man from the south and when he stood there with his arm around his friend the booing stopped. Later Robinson said "that arm around the shoulder saved his career". (1 Thessalonians 5:11) says 'encourage one another and build each other up'. When you do that you may be surprised how far your actions will go.

An owner of a drive through coffee business in southwest Portland, Oregon, was surprised when one morning one of his customers not only paid for his own mocha but also paid for the mocha for the person in the next car. It put a smile on the next person's face that did the same. Actually that giving of mocha to the person behind them lasted for the next 2 hours, the next 27 customers. Placing on smiles and encouraging people. So this morning can I have you grab that marble again and determine that with God's help you will choose to not take the journey alone, to consider that when it comes to being a Christian that you will be one who acts out their faith by looking for places to put someone else first, look at ways to get better connected for you own care, and look for ways to let the Holy Spirit flow through you to encourage others. When that happens something wonderful happens here.