TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Bobby Rader/Opening Prayer by: Ken Coleman
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Danny Balch

#869 We're Marching to Zion
#864 Where the Gates Swing Outward Never

Scripture Reading by: Rock Cary
#386 He Loves Me
#701 My Jesus I Love Thee

Communion Devotional by: David Smith
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#882 No Tears in Heaven
Sermon: "Making Disciples"
Matthew 28:18-20

#852 When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder
#870 Beyond This Land of Parting
Closing Prayer by: Gus Tristan

We will be meeting in the Fellowship room and discussing the small groups we will be starting up this month

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Jan. 8, 2023

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Going to Church

Why are we here? I don't mean that existentially. I am talking about you, sitting there reading the bulletin this morning at our assembly. Why have we gathered together? Why are you here?

It wasn't that long ago that it was common to hear sermons emphasizing the assembly to the point that you need to be here or you'll be in hell. Neglecting it has been viewed as a mark of such unfaithfulness that it was about the only reason some congregations would exercise church discipline; conversely, someone could be regarded as a "faithful Christian" if they were at every service, even if the rest of their life was an utter wreck.

We typically do not hear that sort of teaching today, and rightfully so. That is a misapplication of a text in **Hebrews** we will note below. But if we do not come here because we are commanded to "go to church," if we are not "forsaking the assembly" if we miss the occasional Wednesday night Bible study…why ARE we here? Or better, if we do not have a thorough understanding of the answer to that question, but we no longer feel the looming threat of condemnation, ARE we here? Regularly? Not just passively sitting in a pew, either: are we involved, are we engaged, are we committed?

The first thing we must understand is what the church even is. There is a sense in which the title of this article, "going to church," is a bit of a misnomer. You don't go to church; you are the church. Yet the idea of going to church still hits on an important inherent concept we often miss. The word church is the translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. In the 1st century Greco-Roman world, this was the term used for the legislative body in a city gathered—called out—to decide specific issues. In other words, its primary usage was for an assembly. This points out something very important for us. While there are many images used for the church in Scripture, the word "church" itself calls attention to what is fundamental: assembly. The church—by definition!—is the people who meet tougher on a regular basis. To be a church, you must meet!

Now, presumably, you believe that on some level; if you didn't, you would not be here reading this today. But let's go to that familiar passage in Hebrews and see something of the why:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **(Heb 10:19-25)**

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Robert Williams, the Mast's son in law has been diagnosed with cancer in his jaw and will have surgery this month.

May Belle Sibley is in San Jacinto Methodist Hospital.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones, Linda Frank, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Susan McCain

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, Jan. 9th at 5:30 p.m..

We will have a meal this Wednesday night at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

Primetimers will be going to Tiger Harry's on Tuesday, Jan. 24th at 6:00 pm. A sign up sheet is on the bulletin board.

Small Groups

We will be launching a new small groups ministry on Sundays this month in lieu of our traditional evening services. If you would like to participate, please sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board. More details will follow.

Congratulations

Congratulations to John & Sara Smathers on the birth of their son, Henry Joseph Smathers. He was born December, 30th, and weighed 8lbs 6oz.

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

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On the one hand, we see here there is an important vertical dimension to our assembly: we come together before God in a special way, drawing near to him in confidence, with assurance, in faith. This is the place where God meets his people. That is all vitally important.

But there is a horizonal aspect of our assembly, too. We not only come together before God; we first come together. One of the most meaningful aspects of the Christian life is the fellowship we have in Christ. That word is not used here, but the concept is certainly present: we are called to keep meeting together, to consider one another, to stir up one another to love and good works, and to encourage each other.

Notice here how the focus is not individualistic, the way we so often view the Christian life. It is not to consider how to love each other and to do good works, even though that would be right and Biblical. Rather, it is to consider how to stimulate, to provoke, to stir up love and good deeds in others. We are talking here about edification. Focus on helping our brothers and sisters to become loving people; aim at stirring up good works in them. And implicit in that is if others need help and stirring up, then we do too!

You see, the aim of our lives as Christians is not merely loving and doing good, but helping to produce that same fruit in our brothers and sisters. To be more precise, it is the "others" who are the objects of our consideration in this text! *Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works*, as the KJV puts it. While that is awkward English—which is why the ESV and other modern translations rearrange it—it captures the force of the Greek well. *One another* is the object of the verb. This is God's call to consider each other. The goal of that focus is to find ways to stimulate each other to love and good works, but the object of the focus is our Christian family. And in considering my brothers and sisters, I need especially to focus on encouraging them.

So now we have a better grasp of what the Hebrews writer is teaching. The point is not that you, individual Christian, must not skip a church service. Ironically, that sort of rule-based application is TOO NARROW a view! He is saying you, church—as a group, as a fellowship, as a family—don't stop getting together! You need to come together and encourage one another!

We are back to the question we led off with: why are we here? There is a problem in that we tend to not really understand fully why it is we assemble. This morning you could sit at home and watch this service just by choice. Or you could turn on your radio or television and hear some great sermons preached at other congregations, you could see and hear some inspiring worship services. And if that is all that church is for, then you could very well just stay home and go virtual.

But that's not what church is all about. The NT calls us again and again to a kind of mutual ministry that involves all of us, together. We are called to be a family, a community, a fellowship. He's called us to come to know and love each other. Again and again the NT uses the phrase *one another*. Love one another. Serve one another. Forgive one another. Encourage one another. You can't do that from a distance. The only way we can effectively encourage one another is by coming together as a family of God. Not just for the sermons or the singing or even praying and eating the Lord's Supper together, but to live in community, in relationship with one another. And not just for Sunday morning services. But on Sunday night. And Wednesday night. And other, less scheduled times. Spending time in each others homes. Living life together.

That is what our new small groups ministry is all about: we need each other! I hope you will commit to becoming more regular in attendance at all of our activities. And I hope you will give this new program a chance to change your perception of what the church is and should be.

Bryant Perkins