



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

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Hebrews 10:19-25

~ Brent Russell ~

- Can you be a Christian on your own?
- Don't we live in a **strange world** these days?
- modern western world has a very **individual outlook**
- your life is your for you to **do with as you please**
 - it is my body therefore I can have abortion
 - it is my life therefore I don't have to listen to my parents
 - my spirituality is MINE therefore I don't have to share it with anyone
 - My faith and how I experience it is something personal
- The idea of **individuality** is **immense** in our modern world
 - What I **experience**
 - What I **see**
 - What I **feel**
 - What I **know**
 - What I **have**
- **It is all about I**
- Yet despite all of this self focus - all this "I'ness" - We are live in a **world that seems very "we" oriented**
- the **Global Village**
- We have **cell phones, faxes email and satellite TV**
- **All connecting us to the rest of the world**
- We can **pick up a phone talk** to people living thousands of kilometers away
- **Illustration about network and reply from Germany**
- It is utterly amazing that literally **billions of people** can be but a moment or two away via phone or email

- **We in a sense are no longer alone** - we are connected via an incredible network of technology
- Yet ask any one who **counsels troubled people** and they will be able to tell you that one of the greatest problems in our modern world is a **lack of a sense of belonging**
- **Unbelievable!**
- That we should be more connected and more in touch with people even far away from us
- Yet we are more lonely than ever
- **Loneliness and a lack of belonging are diseases of the modern world**
- When I was in **London** some years back it was absolutely bizarre that one could be on a **tube train** for ages with a hundred people in the carriage with you and not a single conversation taking place - a huge group traveling in silence reading, staring at the floor or dozing off
- **Someone once said of big cities - they are places where thousands of people can be lonely all together...**
- There are a multitude of complex reasons as to why this should be the case which I do not want to touch on now
- I believe that this **isolation** - this **self focus has crept into the church**
- And what has **crept in with it is often a sense of loneliness**
- **Spiritual loneliness**
- And more often than not it is **self inflicted**
- Now let me at the outset state that this **church has greatly impressed me**
- The **level of Pastoral care that Jay and her team** are absolutely amazing
- Last year they managed to contact almost every family in this congregation
- Something that does not happen even in a 10 year cycle in many other churches
- **But I would believe that on the ground we are not all that different from other churches**
- Let me **illustrate with a simple exercise** : have a look around and see how many people in the church you know on a first name basis
- A couple probably know lots and lots of people maybe half the congregation even
- **But the truth be told - many will only know a handful**

- Now out of those people you know for how many of them do you know how they are **spiritually? what issues they are really dealing with**, what great good things happen in their lives
- It is so easy in the church to be **spiritually isolated** from those around you
- Like walking on a **city street with hundreds or thousands** of others
- But all strangely caught up in their own worlds
- You see **we love our modern sense of aloofness and of self-sufficiency**
- **Of self-reliance and self-confidence**
- But a byproduct of this is a spiritual isolation
- A spiritual anemia if you will
- A lack of a sense of community and belonging
- And as I have said it is often self-inflicted - we are afraid of talking about our faith in Jesus with other people
- *Hebrews vs 25 - let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing*
- Meeting - coming together - fellowshiping
- For the early church there were two religious meetings that they would have attended during any given week

Synagogue

- The first would have been a synagogue for public worship - You see the early Christians did not see themselves as apart from Judaism but rather an extension
- The synagogue worship would have been similar in some way to our service
- Hymns, reading of scripture and a sermon or exposition of the scripture

Homes

- But the church met often in homes
- An informal coming together of the believers to share a meal
- A time to be taught - Paul in fact one night taught so long a young man fell asleep and fell out a window - Paul raised him to life and continued teaching!

- In both the NT and OT the **concept of community was very important**
- **Koinonia - fellowship to share with each other**
- In the Bible there is never really a concept of individual faith
- There is certainly the idea of **personal responsibility for sin in Ezekiel 18** the father is responsible for his sin as is the son responsible for his own
- But there is never any idea of faith outside the koinonia of other believers
- The idea of being a **child of God outside of the relationship of our brothers and sisters is not in the Bible**
- We see that even **Christ is our elder sibling**
- There is the concept of the **Body of Christ** - the church - each part doing it's own thing
- In fact even **God is in essence koinonia** - the trinity is a fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - the three are separate yet we cannot and must not think of them as being independent
- Are you getting some idea of the importance of the fellowship of the believers is
- Are you grasping the concept?
- **I believe that the fullness of the Christian faith can ONLY be experienced in a faith community**

Let us return to Hebrews to see what the writer has to say about the community:

Hebrews 10:24

*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.*

Spur one another on towards love and good deeds

- It's **world cup** cricket time
- **Nelson Mandela** Cricket advert on TV
- bang bang bang bang bang
- When the **crowd is full of excitement** and the bowler is getting ready to bowl
- And the crowd begins to **beat the rhythm on the side boards**

- bang bang
- It is almost if the bowler **feeds off the energy** of the crowd
- It is easy to be lazy on your own
- **Illustration of two horses in pulling competition**
- And so it is with our **spiritual lives**
- When we are not in a community it is **easy to not be pushed**
- It is easy to become **lazy**
- **But when we are in a community we find ourselves able to do so much more**
- **in math's $1 + 1 = 2$**
- but in human terms the **sum is always greater than the parts**
- We need others around us to help us to reach the **maximum of our potential in Jesus**

Love

- The author of Hebrews writes about being spurred on towards love
- **pushed in our ability to love**
- If you are never shown **affection** it is difficult to know how to display it yourself
- Or if you never receive **compliments** you will not know how to give them
-
- In a **community we can spur each other on towards love**
- Sometimes we need to be **taught how to love**
- **Love is not something you feel but something you do**
- We need to **learn to love by watching others love**
- It is by working alongside others that we can **mutually teach each other**
- We see the ways in which other people express affection and love for those who are in need
- We can **correct and guide each other to change unhealthy attitudes into loving attitudes**

Good deeds

- **But not only towards love but Good deeds**
- We all know a bout **brain storming**
- When a group of **like minded individuals** get together and seek a common goal
- Normally a brainstorm is far **more creative and productive than one person working on their own**

- And so it can be with good deeds
- One of the reasons we have **good news** time in our services
- We can hear someone say you know I did this thing and wow look what happened!
- Then you think to yourself - hey I can do that!!

- And so we spur each other on
- **stretching each other in faith, love and good deeds**
- **Perhaps realizing you have answers to needs you never new about**
- Perhaps through a **seed planted** in your mind by someone else you come up with a new idea for ministry

- **folks this will ensure we don't become spiritually stagnant**
- It is so easy to get **bored with our spirituality**
- or to remain **spiritually immature and underdeveloped**
- **Back in Hebrews 5:11 we read that some people are spiritual infants - needing milk not solid food**
- And some are still babies because of a lack of a community that can spur them on to love and good deeds

Let us Encourage one another

- Have you ever gone on a **long hike**
- The kind of hike where by the end of the day you are **seeing double, your legs feel like jelly, your head is pounding and you backpack feels like you are carrying a jumbo jet?**
- If you had to do it on your own I am willing to bet good money that you would not do as well as you would when you are with good friends
- With friends you spend time **laughing and joking** that makes the time pass quickly
- You **share your water and food with each other**
- But most of all you encourage one another - up those **long hot hard hills** you walk alongside the weakest person **encouraging** them helping them perhaps even **taking some of the load out of their packs for them**

- Part of the koinonia - the fellowship or family that Christians are to be part of is the ability to encourage each other

Bearing the load

- ***Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.***
- We need our **koinonia** to help carry our burdens
- Like the **hikers**
- sometimes the **suffering or loss** we may experience in our lives may **feel to heavy** for us to carry
- It may seem that our **troubles are going to crush us under their weight**

- we should be **encouraging each other** in the face of difficulties - words of **strength and encouragement** rather than **ridicule or oppression** that we may experience elsewhere
- In a small group we can carry each others burdens and walk alongside each other in the tough times
- **And as I preached on two weeks ago the tough times will be there...**

- But it is so much easier to **bear the burden together**
- **Let us take Jesus as our example...**
- **He drew away a smaller group of disciples with him as he went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray in anguish about the crucifixion.**

- Bear one another's burdens

temptation

- **We like Jesus are going to be tempted** and it is not always easy to resist the temptations in our lives
- It is however much **easier to be tempted when we do things in secret**
- In secret no one knows what you are doing or how you are being tempted

- Sharing your temptation in a community immediately **brings the temptation into the light**
- **No longer is it hidden**
- The temptation is no longer yours alone but is shared to some extent by the group
- The group can then **hold you accountable for how you now react to the sin**
- By doing that you are **saying to your community I need your help**
- **They can pray with you and for you so that you can resist the temptation**

Affection

- **Even in good times encouragement is important**
- When things are going well it is nice to hear that it is!
- **A compliment for a job well done** is worth more than it's weight in Gold
- our **encouragement can be little signs of affection**
- Part of being in the **community of believers is to edify each other!**
- **1 Thessalonians 5:11 says we must encourage each other by building each other up**
- Part of belonging to the community is to build each other up
- To make each other stronger - to edify each other
- **We must not forget to encourage in good times and bad**

Conclusion

- Practically you may be beginning to realize that many of these things cannot be achieved on a Sunday service
- Trust me it is difficulty enough to **remember names**
- **How can we ever hope to meet each and every persons needs?**

- **One of sessions focuses for the year is small groups**
- groups where a more intimate sense of community - koinonia can be had
- **Where we can spur one another on in love and in good deeds**
- **Where we can encourage and build one another up**
- **70% of our congregation is not in a small group**
- That means that 70% of our congregation is almost certainly missing out on being spurred on
- missing out on **being encouraged and encouraging others**
- We would like by the end of this year have far more of you in small groups
- **It is healthy for you to be one one**
- **It is a place where you can move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity!**

- Clearly the **community of believers is important**
- In fact trying to be a Christian without having a Christian community is like trying to **play cricket with only one player**
- **You can try**
- You may even make the end of the game if you don't **die of exhaustion**
- **But to win is going to require something extraordinary**

- God has always wanted us to be part of his family
- His koinonia his fellowship

- And this fellowship must include those who are brothers and sisters in the faith
- There is no families of *God* where each of us is in family with the Father, Son and Spirit
- We are all part of The family of *God*