



Hebrews 10:19-25  
 “Following Jesus: No Solitary Christians”

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This morning we are wrapping up a brief pair of messages about Following Jesus. Next week we will start a new series for 5 Sundays in the Old Testament book of Ezra. Ezra is all about the rebuilding of Jerusalem – from the walls to the people. It should be an encouraging 5 weeks for anyone who has any kind of rebuilding going on in their lives now or in the future whether that’s rebuilding a marriage, a job, a church, or our own individual lives once this pesky pandemic is over.

But first we wrap up this little two Sunday mini-series. Last week we looked at what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. And what we saw, through Jesus’ interaction with Peter, is that Jesus leaves no room to be his disciple and use him for our own tendencies of consumerism through promotion and protection of our own interests. Jesus is not a tool or an instrument to simply get what we want, or protect our positions of power and comfort. We’re called to “deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow” Jesus. We are to have in mind the things of God, and not the things of people.

But what does it look like for people who follow Jesus to come together as a group? In other words: **What does it look like and mean to be a part of a church?** Or maybe we even wonder: why be a part of a church? What’s the point?

Let’s start with a couple foundational things before we get to today’s passage. First, let’s be clear about who’s church it is. In the Gospel of Matthew, the same conversation between Peter and Jesus is recorded that we looked at last week. But Matthew gives us just a little more detail about what Jesus said. And in Jesus’ initial response to Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, and before Jesus rocked his world and taught that the Messiah would suffer and be killed, Jesus said this to him: **“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18)**. There’s a lot that can be said about this statement, but the thing I want us to focus on is who’s church it is that’s being built. **Jesus says it is His church.** This is true with the “capital ‘C’

Church” – the Global Church – as well as for each individual church from the house church to the largest of mega-churches. Wedding we went to last night: bride and groom are part of a house church with maybe 30 people. That church is Jesus’ church. Then there’s Yoi-do Sum-go-bum, in Seoul Korea...a church that Gwen and I attended when we lived in Seoul for several months in our first year of marriage. The founding pastor (retired) of that church, Dr. Paul Yongi-Cho, just passed away this last week at the age of 85. That church has a membership of about 480,000. It also belongs to Jesus. So, from the largest mega-church to the smallest house church, they all belong to Jesus.

Again, I said it a few weeks ago and I’ll say it again, this is why Christians make such a big deal about Jesus. Sometimes you’ll hear people say, “Why do Christians make such a big deal about Jesus?” **The reason Christians make a big deal about Jesus is because Jesus makes a big deal about himself.** He *is* the New Covenant between people and God, which is what we looked at a few weeks ago and why he’s such a big deal. And here we see he’s a big deal because the Church belongs to him. We may not always live into that very well...sometimes we let our own preferences, politics, power, and self-preservation get in the way...and that’s a first-rate consumer problem when we do that; but that does *not* change the fact that the Church belongs to Jesus. Period. Including here: *This* church belongs to Jesus.

**Second, Jesus gives the Church its mission.** This ties in with what we talked about last week: When we are a disciple of Jesus, it’s his mission that matters rather than our own self-promoting and self-preservation consumerist mission. We don’t conform Jesus to *our* will; *we* are conformed to *his*. So, His mission is important. The Church, including this church, ought to be all about His mission.

At our Elders meeting this last Tuesday evening, the devotional I led us in was about Jesus’ mission. I highlighted four statements Jesus makes that seem to encompass his mission. Luke 4:18-19, where in a local synagogue Jesus reads this passage from Isaiah: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for**

**the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).**

And then a moment later Jesus declares that this passage – written 600 years earlier or so – has been fulfilled in their hearing...which blows their minds and they come unglued that Jesus would make such a claim. This is part of his mission – it's one of freedom, healing, declaration of the Good News, and proclaiming the favor of God for other people. It's focused outwardly.

Then, when Jesus says, **"For the Son of Man [title referring to himself] came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).** This is one I've personally tended to lift up as Jesus' mission statement because it is the simplest and most laser-focused reminder that Jesus' mission was always about other people. He's focused on those who are far from the Kingdom of God. Because churches tend to get inward focused, we need to be reminded that the church does not exist for its members, but for those outside its "membership." This statement of Jesus' does that most clearly. You can't read this and make discipleship to Jesus about ourselves.

Third, in Matthew 20, Jesus says, **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).** Again, Jesus' mission is about others (sensing a pattern?). Specifically here, it's about serving others, even to the point of giving his life as a ransom. This implies a mission of freedom once again, like the first one.

Lastly, Matthew 28:19-20, **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).** This is also outwardly focused, but it gives more detail about the mission: we're to go and make disciples, and baptize people and teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. This is probably the best-known of all of these, but because it's a little more complex and detailed, it's easy to lose the outward focused nature of it. It's easy to think the Church is all about studying Scripture and memorizing Bible passages so we would be more obedient when that's not at all what Jesus is saying: It's about Christians doing these things with non-Christians,

so they'd know Jesus, and then they would live these verses out and reach non-Christians, and on it keeps cycling through.

**Put these all together, and Jesus' mission statement would be something like: Jesus exists to reach the lost, heal the sick and infirmed, proclaim the good news, serve others (to the point of death) – all to set people free and make disciples who will then teach this mission so others can carry on this mission.**

So, the Church belongs to Jesus, and He gives it its mission. This relates to the passage we read from Hebrews a few minutes ago. The first few verses have huge emphasis on Jesus, and it uses the temple and the ministry of the priests in the temple as a metaphor for who Jesus is and what he does...but it's more than a metaphor at the same time because Jesus takes place of all that stuff in this New Covenant. He fulfills all that stuff of the Old Covenant, and embodies it in himself.

Then in verse 23 there's a bit of a turn, and we see the focus on being a part of the Church. The Church is built on Jesus, He *is* the New Covenant with God the Father that we enter into through faith, the Church *belongs* to Jesus, the Church gets its *mission* from Jesus, and then here in Hebrews – and we see this elsewhere also – we find out how we go about living into this mission.

**We carry out this mission with hope, love, good works, meeting together, and encouraging one another.** Like the slogan for KLOVE radio network (anyone listen?): These things are “positive and encouraging”! And by-and-large, the Church is positive and encouraging. “Encouraging news,” however, does not make for good ratings for the media – bad news sells newspapers and advertising slots. So, your impression of the Church might not be all that great if you're not a part of one.

But the fact is, the Church is where you find these things. We have some of these words on the outside of our church along the driveway on some banners, and we use them elsewhere, too: Real Hope, Real Love, Real Life. The first two of those are very concretely right here in this passage, and Real

Life summarizes the last three (meeting together, good deeds, encouragement). Jesus offers these things and we experience them in community: in the Church.

In fact, just this last Tuesday night I had a brief conversation with someone from the church about “hope.” If I remember right, it was a friend of his who is not a disciple of Jesus who said she didn’t really have any hope. And the guy from our church in talking with her husband later, said that if it weren’t for his faith in Jesus, he probably wouldn’t have hope, either. The world doesn’t really offer hope. I mean, anyone can have “hope” in the sense of “I hope the Mariners make the playoffs” or “I hope I win the lottery.” But let’s be honest: winning the lottery is luck and the Mariners making the playoffs is going against tradition. Why break tradition now, right?

Real hope is deeper than that, and as this friend of one of our congregants is discovering: life doesn’t offer a lot of hope apart from Jesus. And so when we’re a part of a church we are encouraged in that hope. We are encouraged in loving people as Jesus loved them.

**That happens when we gather together. That’s the theme that is most commonly emphasized in this Hebrews passage, and with good reason.** It’s a strong reminder about the importance of meeting together. This can take a variety of forms and be for a variety of purposes, but the first gathering most people think of when they read this is gathering together in worship, such as we are here, or are gathered together online. And maybe we have different experiences or thoughts about meeting together for worship.

For instance, a man went to see his doctor for advice about being cured of snoring. The doctor asked, “Does your snoring disturb your wife?” The patient replied, “Does it disturb my *wife*? Why it disturbs the *entire congregation*.” Worship is not a time for snoozing. But if that’s your experience and if the sermon puts you to sleep then either you or I are not doing a very good job. Either *I* need to preach more engaging sermons or *you* need to go to bed earlier on Saturday night. ☺ Today, I’m the one who needed to go to bed earlier, because that wedding went late last night, and I

wasn't in bed until midnight. Fortunately, we must all be doing pretty well because this is an awake congregation every Sunday.

But getting together for a service like this is where we gather in community to praise God, pray for others, confess, be reminded of God's forgiveness and grace, hear the written Word, hopefully have it taught and explained so we understand it better and will be better equipped to live our faith out in the world the rest of the week, and more. This is why we don't want to neglect meeting together. I get it that in the midst of the pandemic it's more challenging. So, if you're at home and you haven't set foot in the sanctuary in 18 months, this is not a critique. I'm glad you're watching online and participating as best as you can. I only hope, for the sake of anyone who can hear you, that you sing half-way decently. 😊

**But gathering together takes other forms, too.** Discipleship classes where we dive into Scripture and have more opportunity for dialog about it – but again, with the end goal of not just head knowledge, but knowledge that gets into our hearts and out to our hands and feet so we'd live it out. Small groups that do much the same thing and often have a larger component of fellowship together, checking in with each other and praying for one another. We meet together when we serve the community – like when several of us got together this last spring to do some yardwork at a transitional housing home here in Kirkland. The list goes on. In all of these things we encourage one another, we have opportunities to love one another, to bring hope to each other...and then we have the opportunity to bring all those things to people outside of the church as well. Remember the various iterations of Jesus' mission that he gives: everything was for others. The Church is the one institution that actually doesn't exist first and foremost for the sake of its members or shareholders or financial investors. We exist for the world, that the good news of Jesus might be made known!

And some of these things a Jesus-follower can do on their own. In fact, a lot of these things can be done individually. But: **The encouragement and fellowship that comes from gathering together with others, and the synergy that comes from joining together cannot be replicated**

**individually.** We need each other; God has designed us to be in community, particularly in community that is centered around Him.

It's been said that there's no such thing as a solitary Christian. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a part of his Church, to be on his mission with him and with other disciples. When Jesus sent the disciples out in ministry, it was never done alone. So as disciples of Jesus, let's stick together. Let's not neglect meeting together: not with our *own* hope, love and encouragement as the end goal, but for the sake of the mission that Jesus calls us to – to share that hope, love, and encouragement with *others*. **That's why it's important that we keep meeting together: To be reminded of the mission that Jesus is sending us on, and then to go out together and live into it.** So, let's keep meeting together. If you're *not* meeting together with other followers of Jesus, I invite you to do that here at Rose Hill. There's room for you here. And together we can be part of this life-altering, world-changing, eternity impacting mission that Jesus has for us. Let's pray...Amen.