

# Community

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The reading today is from Hebrews 10 and it starts at verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone who deserves to be punished, who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, It is mine to avenge, I will repay, and again the Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[ 1 : 3 8 ]     Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution, and other times you stood side by side those who were so treated.

You suffered along with those in prison, and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourself had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence.

It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay, and by my righteous one will live by faith, and I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved. Hi there, I'm David. I'm one of the members in Cornerstone.

If you're just joining us today for the first time, it's great to have you with us. Let me just orientate where we are just now. Over the last few weeks, Neil has been talking about what Jesus said from the cross, some really powerful words.

[ 2 : 5 6 ]     Before that, we were looking at spiritual disciplines, and for the next few weeks, we're going to look at one or two other spiritual disciplines. And today, the particular discipline that we're going to look at is community.

And already, you've had a sense of that community. As, you know, Fraser and Emily spoke about their time during lockdown, with Caitlin, during Anna Lauren's prayer, we pray for many folk in Cornerstone and beyond.

So that's a little taste of what community means here at Cornerstone and what we aspire to. But if you've got your Bibles open, or if your phones are at hand, I want you to look again at the passage we read there in Hebrews 10, because we're going to look at it through the lens of Hebrews 10, and we're going to pay quite close attention to the word.

So look at verse 24. It says, And let us consider how we may spur one another on, toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together.

It's a bit ironic, isn't it? Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

[ 4 : 12 ] The social scientists tell us that community is collapsing. HuffPost did a survey recently, now bearing in mind that 82% of statistics are invented, but HuffPost said that only 10% of people surveyed would actually introduce themselves to a new neighbour.

So if you're one of those folk who go along with scones or pancakes to your new neighbour after the removal vans are coming in, well done, you're part of an elite. Only 25% of people would actually leave a key with a next door neighbour if they were going away for any extended time.

I wonder, could you pass this test? Do you know the names of your neighbours and the five houses on either side of you?

And if you live in Edinburgh, we live in a very self-contained environment, and community is very much fading away. There's many reasons for that, of course.

You look at the average home today, we've built a self-contained unit within our little boxes that we call homes. We don't need to go out for entertainment with other people because we've got, you know, almost cinema screen quality TVs with the omnidirectional sound.

[ 5 : 36 ] It's an amazing experience. Who needs to go to the cinema when you've got your, you know, online cinema all around you? You can even have a popcorn making machine in your own house to go along with your cafe standard cappuccino maker.

We've made our houses really, really comfortable and self-contained. And even when we walk about anymore, it's almost like a Doctor Who movie. You just watch and Princess Street are folk going on and everybody's staring at this box as they've been controlled by some other worldly dimension.

And so community is going. Social media has carved out alternative communities. The rise of, you know, car and transport. We sit inside our little tin boxes and we don't engage.

We don't engage with other people. Do you not think that we were made for more than this? And often maybe you have a rare night out with friends or you go around to someone's house and it's really good.

And you come away thinking, wow, that was quite special. Didn't cost a lot of money. It wasn't very high tech. It was just a group of people getting the crack, just sitting down, yarning and talking.

[ 6 : 54 ] So I think we were built for that. Where did all that come from? Well, there's a reason for that because it all came from God.

If there is a good thing in this world, whatever that good thing is, whether we acknowledge it or not, it does come from God.

And the Christian faith offers community. I mean, even in the passage, if you look at these words, look at verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, that's language that we don't often hear in the workplace, for example.

We don't talk about our colleague in the next desk. A sister or brother would get some real strange books. But yet the language of family, the language of community is embedded into it.

In fact, Christianity can only be lived out and we can only function as Christians within community. There was a Bible translator known as Moffat.

[ 8 : 01 ] This is a Moffat's Bible translation. It's an unspectacular translation. But he said this, there is no room for the pious particle. You know, a particle on its own has no place within the Christian church.

Now, there's a reason for this. And the reason is really quite incredible. Maybe you've heard this expression before, we're made in the image of God.

As Christians, we're guilty of using all these expressions and we assume everybody understands them. But what does it mean to be made in the image of God?

Now, my own thinking has been challenging and in fact even changed during this week because I'm a sort of product called the 60s and 70s, I'm highly individualistic.

So whenever I hear these words, man made in the image of God, I think that I am made in the image of God. So there is, God is creative. So we are creative.

[ 9 : 07 ] But I was reading this week that when man is made in the image of God, that really means that the image of God is only seen in the whole of society.

And it makes sense. God is so big that one person cannot reflect him. So the whole of our society, the whole of community is required to reflect the image of God.

I got this through reading an old Dutch dude called Herman Baving, who is known to some of you, this idea that only humanity in its entirety can reflect God.

So when we talk about God, we talk about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You've heard the name Trinity before, the Trinity Centre, and Aberdeen, a shopping centre, what Trinity is in our language.

And that simply means that God is not a monad. God is not one. He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, God in himself is community. So it stands to reason that we, who reflect the image of God, have also to be community.

[ 10 : 28 ] That's why it flows into so many areas. Even church life. We as a church are not an independent church. We are connected to many other churches in Scotland, and then indeed throughout the world.

We're not independent. We are connected to one another. So there we are, this idea, this yearning for, you know, community that we all have, that's integral to what we are as people, integral to what it means to be truly human.

Now, it's challenging, isn't it, in these days of lockdown and increasing alienation when we can't even visit one another after last Thursday's latest restrictions.

It is difficult being people of community in that environment. But let's look at this passage and let's see what the passage says.

First of all, big picture context. Do you love positivity? Are you the sort of person who loves positive words? You've imbibed the power of positive thinking.

[ 11 : 42 ] Well, you will not be disappointed in verse 19 onwards. You will love it because it's always talking about moving on. It's talking about hope.

It's talking about, you know, entering into the presence of God. The idea there is, you know, there's your first positive word in verse 19. We have confidence to enter the most holy place.

What is all this alluding to? It's alluding to the Old Testament and that the centre of Old Testament worship was the temple. And at the very centre of the temple was the Ark and the Holy of Holies.

Now, most folk have got Old Testament temple theology, not from the book of Leviticus, but from Steven Spielberg and the Raiders of the Lost Ark.

It's not great, but at least it's a start. It gives you some big idea. The deal was that God was represented as being present in the Holy of Holies, but it was really difficult to get to God.

[ 12 : 46 ] It was like a computer game with multiple levels and it was impossible to get into that Holy of Holies, the central part of the temple.

The temple was like a series of concentric squares, if that's not a contradiction. And only the high priest could get into the centre, could get into the presence of God.

And that was only once a year in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, never without blood. And then, as Neil was telling us the last few weeks, Jesus died on the cross and all of a sudden he became the temple.

All of a sudden he became the high priest. There was a curtain between the rest of the temple and the Holy of Holies. Jesus became that curtain. And because of what Jesus did on the cross, we are able to meet God.

Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, dying for our sins, we are able, and look at these words, we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

[ 13 : 54 ] It is finished. Again, Neil spoke about that a few weeks ago. Everything is fulfilled in Jesus. And so, because, basically, we are reconciled to God.

Basically, because we live with God and indeed, we have a union with God through Jesus. Three times, he says, let us do something. Verse 22, let us draw near to God.

Verse 23, let us hold on to the hope. Verse 24, let us spur one another on in love. So, he's excited here.

He's saying, let us do certain things because we are reconciled with God. And have you noticed the three times he says, let us, it's connected to faith, hope, and love.

You see that in the passage before us. So, we're looking particularly at that last let us there in verse 24.

[ 14 : 58 ] And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. And we do this in community.

You see that in verse 25, not giving up meeting together. When I was preparing this sermon, I went on to a website that's full of sermons, hundreds of sermons on Hebrews 10, 25.

Don't worry, I didn't commit plagiarism. But I was looking down all the titles, you know, what various preachers, the great and the good, what's their sermon titles for Hebrews 10, verse 25, and living in church, and living in community.

And one of them struck me, it was, you must go to church. I thought, oh, that's a bit stark. You must go to church. Well, I'm not saying that's not correct, but it's a little bit more nuanced and a little bit richer and a little bit more beautiful than that.

It's not as if God is saying because as we say to a child, you must eat your food. What does the passage say about community then, or living in community? Look at verse 24, and the first thing we see there is slightly odd, and that is community comes from reflection.

[ 16 : 25 ] 24, and let us consider how we may spur one another. That word consider is really important.

It means let us give some concentrated thought. There's a degree of reflection required. Interesting, the same word is used in chapter 3, verse 1, let us consider Jesus.

So, we have to consider community in the same way that we have to consider Jesus thoughtfully. Anna Lauren spoke about two couples in Cornerstone who are about to get married.

There's a bit in the marriage vows that say in the preamble that marriage is to be entered into not thoughtlessly and inadvisedly, but it's to be entered into with, you know, due consideration for it.

And so, that's exactly what he's saying here about community. Consider it. Pay thoughtful attention. It's a bit like buying a gift.

[ 17 : 37 ] There's some folk who are really good, I was almost going to say gifted, but there's some folk who are really good at buying a present. You know that person who buys you a present.

It need not be all that expensive, but it's always appropriate. It just brings a smile on your face and how apt and how it just fits the situation.

I was online going away due last week for a work colleague and the presents given to him were just so apt. It brought a smile on her face.

And so community has to be entered into not thoughtlessly, but thoughtfully. It comes from reflection. What can I do as we reflect?

It's not just something that's random. The Christian faith is not just moving about with feelings all the time.

[ 18 : 40 ] We've got to do intentional things. That's a kind of N word just now, intentionality. So as we consider community, and maybe even if we're not a believer, we're not quite there yet, I can assure you that we aspire to a culture that doesn't just make itself up as we go along.

We want to ask ourselves, how can we be more together? How can we be more loving? So community comes from reflection.

reflection. So the origin of community is reflection. But the aim of community is in verse 24, love and good deeds. Again, you see it, how we may spur one another on towards love and towards good deeds.

Do we need love in the current climate? As soon as the pandemic kind of broke out, I thought I'm going to have a lot of time to read here.

So I bought Albert Camus book, The Plague. It's a real Scottish reaction, isn't it?

[ 19 : 57 ] You buy a good absurdist novel to get you through that. And there's a line I underlined. It says, thus each of us had to be content to live only for the day, alone, under the vast indifference of the sky.

The last few weeks have been tough in lockdown. Many of us are in families, many of us are in community, but there will be some of you who can identify with Camus' reflection, alone, under the vast indifference of the sky.

Into that culture, into a culture of division and despair, into a culture where we just watch the 10 o'clock news and it's so incredibly depressing.

There is political division everywhere, there's just a sense of tension, the unemployment figures are going through the roof, there's economic uncertainty, there's social unease everywhere.

What do we need we need surely above everything love and to be spurred up to good deeds. There's even division about how to treat the virus.

[ 21 : 20 ] Community, if it is anything, as we've seen in these words, it is in the context of encouragement, not of discouragement.

A guy called Max Brooks, a philosopher, said this, it's great to live free of the other sheep until you hear the wolves howl.

It's great to live free of the other sheep until you hear the wolves howl. The wolves are howling, folks. And in the church, God is saying, look, don't forsake the gathering of ourselves together.

How do we do that again? Look at the passage. Consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. The language there is like the language of soup.

I've never made soup in my entire life, but I've seen how it's done. Basically, stuff is put in a pot and it's stirred up.

[ 22 : 25 ] That's the image there. if we're not in the pot, if we're not in the soup, we can't be stirred up. So, maybe this is the thirsty thought.

Are you in the soup? Are you willing to be stirred up? So, is it together we can release that savoury, life-giving fragrance that will spur us on?

And so, what does love look like? Well, it looks like Jesus. I thought even this morning as I was reflecting, where is love in Hebrews?

You know, it's not like the great 1 Corinthians 13 passage, which even those of you who maybe don't go to church all that often, you've all heard 1 Corinthians 13, maybe a wedding or some love is kind, etc.

Hebrews, the book of Hebrews here that we're reading from isn't a 1 Corinthians 13 kind of book, but it's got love in it. It speaks there of Jesus.

[ 23 : 32 ] I was reading in Hebrews 2 verse 9, it says that Jesus, who was crowned with glory and honour, and yet he suffered death for us.

That's what love looks like. I was also reading yesterday in the week, a guy called Rio Franciscato, and he spent 30 years in the Amazonian jungle in Brazil, in the state of Rondonia.

And his job was to protect the indigenous people. He loved the indigenous people of the Amazonian rainforest. He dedicated his life to protect them, to make sure that they had their rights.

Last week, he approached one of the uncontacted tribes, and one of them fired an arrow and shot him through the heart.

The people he went to help killed him. they mistook him for an invader. What does love look like? Love looks like giving, even when sometimes you are rejected.

[ 24 : 53 ] Love looks ridiculous. And yet, that's what community looks like. The ridiculous love, we're all in the soup, we're all stirring one another up to love and good deeds.

But we see something else here. we see that community actually means meeting. Verse 25, it says there, not giving up, meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

Now, we're in unusual circumstances just now. We are doing online church. As someone said, recently, online church is a bit like the online fire brigade.

or the online ambulance service. There is an element of ridiculousness about it. It's unreal. It's not normal. It's not right.

But we are where we are. It's all we have at the moment. And we're developing community online, but it is a poor reflection, and it cannot ever substitute for meeting together physically, for seeing one another, for touching one another.

[ 26 : 13 ] Yes, even for arguing with one another, for being in that same room. And so he says, don't give up meeting together. on the ball, which is a famous Scottish football program, radio program, where football pundits start talking about various things.

they were making the point that football games just now without crowds run a risk. And one of the guys says, I wonder, will they all come back?

In the church, I hope that we will all come back. Now, this is not specifically stated, but it is implied that we physically meet together as a church.

The word there, meeting together, the Greek word has in the middle of that word, a word which equates to the word that we often use as synagogue, the place where the people met together.

Christian community involves much more than the organized meeting together, but it doesn't involve less. So we meet together on Sunday, we meet together in city groups.

[ 27 : 41 ] And this passage is just encouraging us to be there, to be in the room. Things happen when you're in the room.

meeting. And so it's great just to get into that room, not just in terms of meetings, I'll come to that later, but just engaging with one another.

Now, when Neil first asked me about three weeks ago to speak this morning, he said it's under the general heading of spiritual disciplines and community.

And at first I thought, is that the right category? In what sense is community a spiritual discipline? You know, it's a bit like, I don't know, chips is a spiritual discipline.

Community's good, but it is a discipline. discipline is doing sometimes often that goes against the natural instincts.

[ 28 : 50 ] Doing a 5k run on a wet Edinburgh morning goes against the natural instincts. We just want to stay in bed doing 20 press ups.

It's a discipline. In what sense is community a discipline? Sometimes we just don't feel like it. You know, there are extroverts that are introverts.

There are some folk who just love folk. There are other folk who just can take or leave people. So the discipline here is that whether we like it or not, whether we feel like it or not, do not give up meeting together.

There are various reasons for that. We had an assistant here for a year at Cornerstone called Chris Davidson.

Chris is planting a church up in Inverness. And Chris introduced me to this expression, the juice is worth the squeeze. how can you be stirred up if you're not in the soup to mix up the metaverse here?

[ 30 : 13 ] It is good to mix with people, maybe people number one you don't agree with, maybe people that naturally you would not be in the same room as.

That's the great thing about the church. church. I love our city group because it's made up of various people. For the first time in my life, I find myself in the older age of a church demographic that's come as a bit of a shock.

I was always a young guy, but we're now part of a church where, yes, there are folk our age, but we're at the older end and what I treat it is to mix with young and old in the same room.

Not even just folk who are like me, not even folk who think the same way, but as we're thrown in together, we really love community as we talk, as we discuss and as we warm each other up.

Community, in the best sense, is encouraging. I remember an old experiment in chemistry, in higher chemistry at school, where you had a taper which was glowing and you put it inside a test tube full of oxygen and it just came alive.

[ 31 : 46 ] That's our vision at Cornerstone. that the fellowship, that the gatherings will be so oxygenated, that when we come together, we come alive.

That we walk away feeling positive, filled with great thoughts about God, obsessed with the beauty of Jesus and just loving the people that we've been with.

that's a tall order and it may even seem otherworldly but it's happening, it's happening even in these days over lockdown and so we want more of it.

You know, don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. I don't play golf but I hang about with obsesses.

A lot of them will say 18 holes is never enough. We've got to do another one. You watch a box set, you watch one episode, you say, nah, can we watch the next one?

[ 32 : 58 ] Yeah. that's the ideal here when we just love being together. Are we at that point? I just love church.

I just love it. I love community. I love the people. Imagine saying that. I mean, some of you maybe don't have a church connection and they're skeptical but church think, how on the earth can someone say, I just love church because it's different when you really know Jesus and Jesus knows you and you know his people.

There is this sense of family and this sense of togetherness. And then you think, well, I don't want to be that vulnerable. Maybe that's the first step to becoming a Christian, to be vulnerable, to admit that you're not the complete package.

Let me apply this very, very briefly, just in our last couple of minutes. We expect here high quality. There's some big words there, encouragement, love, good deeds.

I work a bit with the South Asian community. South Asian Muslim people, great folk, and we talk to them about Jesus.

[ 34 : 26 ] We talk to them about the Lord Jesus Christ being the way, the truth, and the life. And that's a lot more than simply going to meetings.

You know, these folk are involved in community. They meet together in what we call baradries, extended families that eat together, they help one another, they are fully immersed in their own communities.

and sometimes when you become a follower of Jesus, it means that the community are not all that happy. What does that look like?

It looks like a life of going to meetings. Surely we can offer more than that. Surely we can offer something that is sublime and positive.

There's an old psalm that says, in dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health. Folks, I hope and I pray that we in Cornerstone will love Jesus, will love each other, and our place will be a place full of joy and health.

[ 35 : 51 ] One last verse, Numbers 10, 29, Moses says to his father-in-law, we are setting out for the place the Lord has told us to go.

Come with us and we will do you good. Can I say to every one of us in Cornerstone and those of you who are looking and thinking of joining us, come with us and we will do you good.

For the Lord has promised good things to us. Amen.