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The One Another Druthers: Greet One Another II Corinthians 13:12; Hebrews 10:24-25

Last Wednesday was Rachel's 18th birthday. Cyndi snuck over to Whitworth to surprise her but I couldn't go. I had to stay home and feel sorry for myself. But the Toones aren't the only one dealing with a new college reality. Patti Weaver is a single mom who took her only child, Emily, over to Whitworth this year, too. When Cyndi and I got back from Spokane, we started imagining how rough this must be on Patti. So, I sent her a text that night: **"Hi Patti: We were just thinking of you and wondering how you're doing. Would you like to come over and have some popcorn with us?"** We wanted to be encouragers! My phone beeped, I picked it up, and this is what it said: **"Sorry... but who is this?"**

Oh well, nice try! We continue with our series "The One Another Druthers." We Christians can treat each other any way we want to...but God would druther that we treat each other certain ways. There are 36 hints in the Bible about what that looks like. 36 "one-anothers." And for a few weeks, we are exploring some of them.

Last week was the Big Kahuna: Love one another. **It is the only command Jesus ever gave his disciples.** This morning, we are going to learn more about how to love one another and you are going to help the scripture reading. Wow... sounds like a theme here. Well, this is God's holy word and it must be obeyed. So, find a complete stranger ... pucker up... All right ... we aren't a very kissy culture. How about a few air kisses ...or, if you feel comfortable... give someone near you a peck on the cheek. But not if you see one of these. [crossed arms]

Remember how I told you "Love one another" is the most frequent one-another in the Bible? How many times? Ten. Do you know what the second most frequent is? "Greet one another with a holy kiss." We are so phobic about germs and touching and personal space that this idea freaks most of us out. We would never make it in the Middle East. They are kissiest bunch of people... Every time my Jewish friend Ronen greets me he plants a big kiss on my cheek. Sometimes on both them.

Now, think about your journey in from the parking lot today. How many people saw you coming, ran over and gave you a big kiss on the cheek? OK...not too many. But seriously, how many of you have ever met **person after person** as they walked out of church, head down, refusing to acknowledge that you were even alive? Raise your hand. Now...how many of you have ever walked out of here that same way? Raise **your** hand.

A few weeks ago, one of my friends told me that as he walked in from the parking lot, he intentionally looked at the people as they passed him. **Not one** of them looked him in the eye and greeted him. He said, "The only thing I could think of was, 'Man, Mark, you must have blown the sermon today!'"

What's this about? Our Washington reserve? Our fear of intimacy? The feeling that, "This person is a stranger; I don't want my space invaded!" We do have at least one usher in this

church who takes Paul seriously. We call her the kissing usher. When Janet welcomes you, you know you've been welcomed! I know it will be an uphill climb convincing you to become a church full of holy kissers...although, we've managed to convert some of you former Lutherans into huggers. Imagine this: a Presbyterian church that hugs, lifts hands and... occasionally even gives holy kisses. John Calvin must be gagging.

But not Paul. He would be thrilled that we were learning to greet each other with a genuine sense of interest and welcome, not necessarily because we know each other-- there are a lot of strangers here—but because we are learning what a privilege it is to belong to the family of God in Christ.

But where were these greetings supposed to take place? Was Paul talking about passing each other in the Harbor or in the Costco vegetable cooler? Maybe. But not mostly! When did these people have the regular opportunity to greet one another with a holy kiss? For a clue, let's turn to another of my favorite one-another passages: **Hebrews 10: 24-25**.

Let's start in the middle of that short passage; verse 25: **"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..."** What meeting was the writer talking about? Tupperware parties? Lemon Drop parties? Worship! The heartbeat of the early Christian Church was their worship life in community. This is where they greeted each other! They met regularly to share the Lord's supper, to study the scriptures, pray, sing, listen to the teaching of the apostles...in other words, a lot like what we do around here.

But some had slipped away. **"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..."** I wrote about 150 emails this summer to folks who had not been in church, just checking on them, making sure they were all right. It prompted some great conversations. Some **were** hurting and needed help. But some said honestly, "We just got out of the habit." It happens, doesn't it? Summer, lazy mornings, a vacation that throws off your schedule, the start of football season... We take on new habits and abandon our habit of meeting together with our church family.

Poor Rachel. We had a five hour drive over to Whitworth... five more hours for me to pack a few more wise tidbits into her throbbing head while I still had a chance. Here's one of them...and I would urge every parent of every college freshman to give the same advice. "Rachel, for the first three weeks of college, I want you to go to church every Sunday. No matter how tired you are climb out of bed and go to church for three weeks in a row. Because the habits you set in the first three weeks of your college life will define the rest of your college career. If you get out of the habit of weekly worship, you will find it harder and harder to get back in." Isn't that true? How many of you were raised in the church and, the minute you got away to college, stopped going... and took a long time to find your way back again?

It is easy for college kids to get out of the habit... and easy for adults, too. In 2010, and apparently 2000 years ago, too. And Hebrews warns us, "Don't do it. Don't give up meeting together..." Actually, that's not a good translation. A better translation is "forsake" or "desert:" "Don't desert one another, as some now have the habit of doing." Desertion! That's pretty harsh, isn't it? Who cares if I don't go to church for a few Sundays? It's no skin off anyone else's nose.

Well...actually...that's not true. And that is precisely the point of this passage. If meeting faithfully with your church family is only about what you get out of the deal, maybe it wouldn't be so dire when you "desert" on a Sunday morning. But the scripture is clear that going to church isn't just about me. First, it's about God; about my worship of him. But it's

also about my church family. You! You are depending upon me.... for two special one-anothers. Did you see them?

The first reason to be faithful in our meeting is this: **"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."** Spur. We owned a horse when I was growing up. His name was Monty. His lower lip was always flopping up and down so we called him M-M-M-Monty. I never wore spurs when I rode him...but it would have helped. Because that old horse was very reluctant to break out into anything more than a sweat. If I wanted to gallop...good luck! But if I could have spurred him along, it would have been good for him; he was fat! It would have been good for both of us if we had ridden faster...experienced something a little more exciting.

The word for spur means "to provoke; to excite." It comes from the word "sharpen"... like the point of a stick. One of the reasons we are supposed to stay in the habit of meeting together is so that we can stick it to each other! Not that way... in the good way. **What** do we spur each other towards? First? **Love!** Remember—love one another. When we meet together, it spurs us to love one another. I can't ignore you if I'm sitting next to you. Even if I don't like you very much... even if you are different from me... if I'm sitting there, worshiping God with you, it is a chance for me to practice loving you. If I hide at home in front of the football game, it is a great way to avoid obeying the only commandment the Lord Jesus ever gave you and me: love one another.

How **else** do we stick it to each other? We spur one another on to **good deeds**. This week, I spurred on a friend who is 30 pounds too heavy and not taking care of himself. I told him he was a heart attack waiting to happen and that he needed to join the Y. And guess what? He did! Then I asked him if I had permission to bug him about working out. He said, "Yes." Poor guy...you can see the spur marks up and down his ribs from me riding him. **Did I do good?** Yes! Was I loving him? Yes! Was I sticking my nose in where it didn't belong???? **Notice how positive this command is:** spur one another on to **good deeds**. It's not **just** negative; saying, "You need to stop looking at porn...." That kind of accountability is important. But this verse is positive: "Let's build a Habitat house together; let's visit our sick friend together; let's memorize scripture together; let's start a Life Group together!" We are supposed to stick it to each other... in a good way!

Tell me, how many of you would have done a mission project three weeks ago if it weren't for Go Sunday? And how many of you who skipped Go Sunday went and served someone on your own? Not likely. How many of you men or high school students would have built homes for the poor in Mexico? How many of you who have served under the bridge or in Cambodia or Romania would have done it if your fellow believers at Chapel Hill were not spurring you on to good deeds? **We don't believe we are saved by our good deeds.** But we DO believe that if we belong to Jesus, we had better be **doing** good deeds. **And if you are sloppy about your church attendance, it makes it easier for you to be selfish about the way you spend your life, your time and your money.**

We meet together to **spur one another**. But there's something else: v. 25: "... let us encourage one another..." One of my favorite characters in the bible is a guy named Barnabas. What does his name mean? Son of Encouragement. That wasn't his given name. His real name was Bernard. But the disciples renamed him Son of Encouragement because he was so good at encouraging—at giving courage to—broken hearted, broken spirited people. We would not have an Apostle Paul if the Son of Encouragement hadn't tracked him down in Tarsus and pulled him out of exile.

The other reason we dare not neglect meeting together is that we **all need encouraging**. There is no such thing as too much encouragement. The most confident person in this room will beam when you tell him, "I am really impressed; you are so good at what you do! Keep it up!" And the most broken person in this room is desperate for someone... anyone ...to notice them and say, "You are going to be okay! Hang in there. Don't give up! I believe in you!" I passed a sister in the hall last week and said, "How ya doin'?" I was beyond her before I heard a **very feeble**, "Okay." I spun around and said, "Stop... come back here. You are **not** okay." And I hugged her... and en-couraged her. It took 30 seconds... a 30 second delay from whatever important thing I was headed to. But there was nothing more important **than that** moment of encouragement.

Encouragement is the opposite of spurring. We need both! Sometimes you need a swift kick in your blessed assurance to get you doing what you need to do. You need to be spurred. Sometimes, you've been kicked so much by life that you need courage to go on. Now, can you spur your brother on while you're lying in bed? Can you encourage your sister from the front of your TV? We can only spur one another and encourage one another ...when we are with one another...**and we make it a habit!**

The first and most important reason we meet together is to worship God. But part of our worship of God is the way we love each other. The way we greet each other warmly...genuinely...with a big fat smackeroo, perhaps. The way we spur one another on when we need a good kick...and the way we encourage one another when we've been kicked too much. Sunday mornings is a good start. What is your Sunday morning habit? How about your kids? What are you teaching them about how important worship is?

But there is another important way we can experience what we've been talking about this morning: Life Groups. Life Groups are small groups that gather regularly for study and prayer and accountability and encouragement. Hundreds of your Chapel Hill family are in Life Groups; did you know that? I'm in one. I love my Friday group of brothers; that group has become precious to me. And I long for every one of you to discover what I have experienced in my own life-the power of small group community.

Last Wednesday night I met with 75 leaders who are being trained lead a Life Group. Every Sunday from now on, you will find Life Group questions in the bulletin as well as on our great new web site. All of the resources are in place. So...how about you?

Do you think you would benefit from being in a group that helps you study the Bible and pray and encourages you to become a better person? When you hear your pastor say that he considers this an essential part of our mission...and you aren't in such a group, does it even make you a little bit curious? If so, I want to meet with you up here right after service and we will talk more. Our dream is that every member of this congregation would be a part of a large and a small community that greets them regularly...that spurs them on ... and that gives them courage. Who here wouldn't be a better Christian because of something like this?

Incidentally, Rachel is taking my advice. Last week, she went to First Pres Spokane along with some friends. After the service they went up to meet the pastor, a friend of mine. He asked Rachel, "So, you're from Gig Harbor?" "Yes." "Do you go to Chapel Hill?" "Yes," she said. "Do you know Mark Toone?" "I know him," she said. Finally someone else spilled the beans. I later asked Rachel, "Why didn't you come clean about who you are?" "Because," my sneaky daughter said, "I was curious to see where the conversation would lead."

Rachel was teasing my friend. But there is a sense in which hundreds of us this morning aren't exactly coming clean, either. We are holding back...not willing to really enter into the kind of community that offers a genuine welcome, a healthy kick in the pants when we need it and some encouragement when we need that, too. And as long as you hold back...as long as you keep things buttoned up, you will never experience what it really means to love and be loved by God's people. **So get into the habit. Make weekly worship a faithful habit. Make a Life Group a new habit. I promise you, it will change you forever.**

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pray together. Take turns reading through the scripture text out loud. Take several minutes to reflect on the passage in silence, circling or underlining meaningful passages. What words or phrases jump out at you? How does this passage speak to your life in specific ways? What one or two things is the Holy Spirit inspiring you to do in your own life? Now, share these thoughts with each other. Don't teach, share and listen! Ask questions of the text and each other. Answer the "So what" question; "so what difference would this make in my life if I took it seriously?"

Dig deeper

1. In a culture that doesn't kiss very much, what do we do with II Cor. 13.12? Why is this one-another essential for our church in our setting?
2. What "habit" does Hebrews speak of? Honestly describe and discuss your worship habits this past three months.
3. What are the two "one-anothers" in the Hebrews text? Which one are you best at giving? Which one do you most need to receive?