

“Together to the End” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 26 November 17, 2024

- I. **Hebrews 10:24-25** – ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not 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.
- II. **One of the great wonders of our world is the redwood forest.**
 - a. Our family went to northern California to see them, and it immediately became clear to me that I had no perspective of how big these trees are because I had only seen pictures.
 - b. In his book, *From Strength to Strength*, Arthur Brooks talks about the way redwoods can get so big...
 - i. He writes, “The redwood can grow to 270 feet tall and 25 feet in diameter. You might think that something that huge must have an incredible root system that goes down deep in order to stand that tall. This is not the case at all. The redwood tree has no tap root and remarkably shallow roots—only five or ten feet deep.
 - ii. It seems to violate the laws of physics that they can stay upright for hundreds – even thousands – of years. That is, until you know one more fact: the redwoods grow in thick groves because their shallow roots are intertwined, and over time, fused together. They start out as individuals and become one with others as they mature and grow.
 - iii. So, beneath the surface of these incredible statuesque trees are roots like an army of men who have their arms interlocked and supporting each other. They are preventing the adversaries of life from knocking each other down.”¹
 - c. It seems that the only way a redwood can grow to its greatest potential is with the other redwoods that prosper around it.
 - i. It reminds me a lot of the body of Christ as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 12.
 1. Paul uses the idea of each person who believes in Jesus as a part of the body... whether hearts, lungs, eyes, feet, hands, or whatever you are, everyone is important to make it work.
 2. When someone decides they operate alone, or don’t need anyone else, then the body suffers.
 - ii. In the case of redwoods with their root system strengthening each other, as Christians, we are better when we operate together.
 1. Time and time again, Scripture reminds us to stay together, to forgive one another, and to love one another in unity.
 2. Colossians 3:14-15 reminds us, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”

3. And Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
 - d. The point is that we don’t walk alone... we don’t grow strong and to our full potential without our brothers and sisters in Christ who are around us.
- III. **It’s difficult to say why, but many Americans are not “joiners” anymore.**
- a. I can remember as a kid when my parents joined all kinds of organizations as a part of their normal lives.
 - i. They served on boards and committees, belonged to recreation clubs, attended dinners and gatherings frequently, and attended and served at church.
 - ii. Many of the organizations that were so popular are slowly dying out.
 - b. It’s the same within the Christian Church as we look at the congregations around us... and even our own.
 - i. How we ever fit 250 plus people in this sanctuary back in the 1970’s I don’t know, but they were doing that for each service.
 - ii. This congregation was a neighborhood hotspot where all the kids came to Sunday School and families were very active.
 - iii. Today, we continue to open our arms to everyone, but the average person doesn’t see the value in joining... or connecting with a family of believers.
 - iv. Our congregation has stayed fairly steady through the years, but churches all around us have closed – whether it be Lutheran churches or many other denominations.
 - c. The roots grow strong when we are living and serving with other Christians, but the sin in us wants to live independently and go our own way.
- IV. **Getting to know others and being known is challenging, but Godly.**
- a. Our sin and brokenness are constantly doing their best to separate us, destroy unity, and isolate us.
 - b. Today, the average person doesn’t know or speak to their neighbors, has very few friends, belongs to no organization, and lacks community.
 - c. A major part in this isolation is the multitude of ways we can spend our time – like watching TV, flipping through endless social media posts and videos, playing video games, mindlessly reading the news and current events online, or individual hobbies and crafts.
 - i. It’s not that we shouldn’t do these things at all – but they become an easy out for us to avoid connection with others... and be active in the kingdom for God.
 - ii. Not only that, but the endless hours we spend on these activities take away from our relationship with God.

1. If we spent the same amount of time per day reading Scripture and living out our faith, what kind of changes might happen for God's purposes?
- d. Again, I'm not saying that spending time alone is sinful... I'm saying that God wants us in some type of community for our spiritual health... but more than that... the spiritual health of others.
 - i. We know that Jesus claimed the great commandments are to love God and love our neighbor... (Matthew 22:36-40)
 - ii. When we spend all our time focused on ourselves and our own desires, we are not loving God and our neighbor...
 - e. More than anything else, your presence in this assembly – this church service – is a statement of support to the people around you.
 - i. I know you might say it's for your benefit... but your presence among us is encouraging and supportive of those around you.
 - ii. Sure, you can stay home and watch a game, or find some other reason to miss our time together, but it's so encouraging to others when they see you here in service.

V. **The Christian connection is rooted and joined together by Christ Himself.**

- a. Colossians 2 says, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith..." (Colossians 2:6-7)
- b. Jesus is the one-time sacrifice (v 12) who gave up His life in order to break down the barriers of sin and brokenness... the selfishness and lack of love.
- c. God "remembers our sins no more," (v 17) and "our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (v 22)
 - i. 1 Corinthians 6 backs this up: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)
 - ii. Our Savior, who died to pay the price for our sin, then brought us into the kingdom by baptism and faith so that we could belong to something bigger than just ourselves.
 - iii. We now belong to the body of Christ – we are the Father's children – and we are constantly being built up and growing by the power of the Holy Spirit.

VI. **Growing in Christ is also growing together as the Body of Christ.**

- a. Always remember that your life is connected to those who believe in Jesus Christ who are around you – especially those within this fellowship of believers at Ascension.
- b. As we know others and become known by them, we are encouraged to continue building the roots of the Spirit that hold us together in all the ups and downs of life.
- c. Rather than neglecting this great gift of our inheritance, we continue to gather in unity until the Last Day... together to the end.

d. May God bless us all in meeting together, loving our neighbors... and growing the roots that anchor us in Christ... until He comes again, Amen.

¹ Source: Arthur C. Brooks, *From Strength to Strength* (Penguin, 2022), page 112; Staff, "What Kind of Root System Do You Have?" John Maxwell Team (Accessed 8/7/24)