

“Being a pain in the neck” Hebrews 10:24-25 7/13/03

The topic of conversation around the office this week was the boating accident out on Lake Minnetonka before the fireworks on July 4th. That led to other conversations revolving around the theme “what’s wrong with America?” Many people suggested that we have somehow lost any sense of corporate responsibility. I am not speaking of corporate in terms of the business world but rather in terms of community. We seemingly have become so individually focused that we lose sight on any sense of community. Two pet peeves. People who park in the handicap spots “for just a second” while they run into the store. I must confess that at times I have commented to people in a parking lot who zoom into the space with no tag, burst from their vehicle and make a dash inside. The other one is at the same parking lot. People who leave their shopping carts in the middle of the parking space rather than putting them in the cart corral. It says to me, “I don’t give a rip for anybody else because I am busier or more important than the next person who wants to park.” So, if you see me pushing multiple carts up at Cub you will know I am not working a second job but rather trying to maintain some sense of being part of a community.

Our passage this morning speaks to this idea of community as the author reminds them that being a Christ follower includes a sense of duty towards the larger community of faith.

Let’s look at our text. Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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.* We are to fulfill our duty in three ways.

Provoke one another to love and good deeds. I have chosen deliberately the first word for in reality the author has chosen a word with an image that is not usually a positive. The NIV uses the word spur, which also has a less than positive image. I remember my mother loved to use the word provoke. Especially when our family of seven we squished into the car for our one per year trip

down to Cape Cod. Joel stop provoking your sister or brother. This usually followed the old “he touched me. No I didn’t!” circular argument. It usually ended up with one of my folks doing the old over the seat swing at what ever didn’t duck quick enough. The Greek means to sharpen, incite, stir up, irritate, provoke. It is done with an end result in mind. Love and good deeds. Now, this seems to cause a huge conflict in my mind. The Bible is telling me to be a pain in the neck to my fellow Christians so that they will respond with love a good deeds. I immediately thought of an historical illustration. The life long commitment by Wilberforce to get Parliament to outlaw slavery in the British Empire. It took his whole life plus some time of constantly raising the issues. Seeking to if necessary even shame his fellow members of the bench to get them to do what was right. To act and rule in a way that was loving and good. He used guilt in a variety of ways to obtain the right response. That seemingly is a no, no but you know what, there are times when the right words, at the right time, can bring about a huge change. I will never forget watching the news with my parents during Dr. Martin Luther Kings’ march to Selma. **Picture 1 and 2** As the police descended on the helpless crowd with attack dogs and billy clubs my dad saying Ruth Marie, this is wrong. This is evil. We can not be silent as an individual and as a church.” And life changed for our whole family after that. He no longer viewed the civil rights movement as something that only the mainline liberal pastors were involved in. Are you willing to risk a relationship in order to provoke a brother or sister in such a way that they act with love and goodness.

Secondly the author tells them that they have a duty to **meet regularly with one another.** At the time this was written and in the context of these scattered churches there were perhaps three reasons why people would not go to church. *They were afraid of being seen.* Persecution was real and gathering for worship made it clear to everyone that you were following this rebel named Jesus. It could be that *they were culturally insulted* by the fact that church membership crossed all social, economic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. They were embarrassed to be seen socializing with those below them. Lastly, *they could have been spiritually proud*, believing that they had no need for the

body of Christ. They had Jesus and that was enough. I do not believe that any of these three are true today. In fact a lack of regular gathering with your faith community is simply viewed with a ho hum attitude. If I have time or if other things aren't pressing then I will go to church.

The last duty that the author speaks of is to **encourage one another.** *Image of Einstein* The unmistakable image of Dr. Albert Einstein brings many issues to mind. His remarkable work in mathematics and physics, his role in the creation of the atomic bomb and his pacifistic stand at the conclusion of the war is only part of the story. Even the urban legend about his difficulties in school come to mind. As he and his family sought to figure out the role of Judaism in their lives they invited to their home a poor Talmudic scholar named Max Talmund. At 21 years of age he joined the family for dinner every Thursday and made a remarkable impression on Albert who was 10. He brought along popular scientific books that reflected increasing complexity. Max then brought mathematics books on algebra and then geometry. It was like turning on the light. For the next several years their relationship continued and soon Albert moved far beyond the knowledge of Max in the sciences and so they also moved into philosophy. Einstein would always refer to the book on geometry as "the sacred little geometry book". For most of his adult life he would look back on the weekly encouragement he would receive from Max and the challenge to go even deeper in pursuit of knowledge as to be the single most important influence in his life. The power of encouragement can have a life long impact and the Biblical author reminds us that it is our duty to encourage one another. I believe all of these flow together. Encourage one another to live and choose on a daily basis to follow the teaching and model of Jesus Christ. To encourage those around you by acknowledging the spiritual growth you see in them.