

## **REMEMBER: PRESENCE**

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

June 9, 2019

Presence has both vertical and horizontal components – God’s presence and our presence. We respond to God’s gracious initiative by showing up with a worshipful spirit. Our faith begins in worship. Everything else within our faith (evangelism, discipleship, missions, etc.) will someday end, but worship never ends. Worship is eternal. We will be present with God forever. If we have learned to love God in this life, heaven is our best news ever. If we have not learned to love God, the idea of being united with God forever may seem like eternal punishment. When we come together to pray and worship, God is honored, His people are blessed, and we are energized and deployed for mission.

When students do not attend class, the outcome is predictable. Likewise, influence and impact are damaged when Christians neglect to come together to be the church. Schools aren’t perfect. Work environments always need improvement. Families have dysfunction. The church, like all human institutions, have imperfections, but if we drop out of school, work, family or church because of limitations, we lose our ability to grow and to influence for good. God moves in special power when His people are present and attentive to the things of God. Great things happen when God’s people show up. Presence builds Christian community in worship and in the world.

**APPLICATION: Asbury’s strategic initiative for 2019-20 is “Helping others follow Jesus by strengthening worship attendance.” I ask our people to keep their vows. We should only miss a Sunday worship service for a reason we know God approves (there ARE those times). Here is a three-part challenge to go with this series: Challenge yourself, your Christian friends and your family to have perfect attendance in worship. Challenge yourself to be fully present and engaged in the worship (singing, prayers, liturgies, sacraments,**

offerings—all of it). Challenge yourself to come with the expectation God is present and eager to be with you. Bring your Bible, wear your nametag and a smile on your face, and find your place with the people of God.

While we do not know who wrote the Book of Hebrews, we do know what the book is about: Hebrews 1:1-4

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

Hebrews is all about Jesus. There are 2 parts:

1.) **WHO Jesus is:** He is not just another prophet. We do not need another prophet – now we have the Son. God Himself. He is the heir, the creator, the radiance, the exact imprint of God’s nature and He upholds the universe.

2.) **WHAT He did.** He made purifications for sins. He has returned to Heaven. Jesus made a tremendous difference for US. This is why Asbury’s mission is: HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS. If we do not follow Him, who (or what) will we follow? You’ve got to serve somebody. Who will it be?

As we read our text today, notice the word “we” and “let us.”

### **Hebrews 10:19-25**

*Therefore, brothers, since **we** have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for **us** through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since **we** have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Let us hold fast** the*

*confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And **let us** consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not 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.*

There are 3 “Let Us” points:

1.) ***let us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Jesus gives us **confidence** to have a relationship with God. We can enter “the holy places.” Remember, the holy places were only for priests who were Jewish men. And the holiest of all places, “The Holy of Holies,” could only be entered into by the Great High Priest once a year on the day of atonement. When Jesus was crucified, that curtain in the Temple was torn in two (*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.* Matt 27:51) Jesus has given us access to God the Father that we never had before. He has become our great **high priest**.

This should forever negate 2 things from happening:

1.) Saying that Jesus is just “one among many”

2.) Saying that we can earn our way to heaven.

2.) ***Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

3.) *And **let us** consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not 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.* This verse is our focus.

We must figure out (“**consider**”) how to **stir up** (like sugar in tea) one another (not just myself) to the goal of love and good works.

“**one another**” – it’s the togetherness we’re looking for.

He lists 2 specific things:

1.) **Presence**. We must be together. What happens when kids don’t show up for class? This is true at every level of school. Often the most painful = college. Kids drop out or flunk when they are not present.

There are a few exceptions, but very few. Kids don't learn. Some learning is academic, dealing with knowledge, but much learning is about experience. Students must make good grades, but much of learning does not come from books – it comes from interacting with people. Kids learn from their peers about standards and ways to study and how to get along. An athlete who doesn't practice, run, exercise, eat right, lift weights, read, listen to the coaches, interact with teammates, may have enough raw talent to succeed at some level, but they will never prevail at the highest level. Some great athletes have been hamstrung by bad attitudes and poor discipline. Some marginal athletes have been so disciplined and worked so hard at it that they have become terrific.

Coming to worship is one component of a Christian's life. It's not the totality. It's not one hour a week. It's part of a series of behaviors and attitudes that produces love and good works.

I could point out that the early church met in homes and other settings. But they understood from our Jewish heritage the importance of getting people together to worship. There are things that happen when we meet together than cannot happen if we only meet alone.

I think the Christian faith is like a 3-legged stool (Personal – like a prayer closet, Small Group – like a house church, corporate – like a synagogue or temple). The early church had all 3 components. They play off of each other.

2.) **Encouragement.** “Encouraging one another” – someone who is encouraging gives confidence to someone else. That's what Jesus did for us. He encouraged us. That's what the Holy Spirit does – He is our encourager. That is what we are called to do for one another.

Encouragement comes in a variety of different ways. Sometimes it's an “Atta Boy” but sometimes its tone is not “nice.”

I think David Brooks book, The Second Mountain, is outstanding I liked his 2015 book The Road To Character, too. That book described people he felt had character. The Second Mountain furthers that. Brooks went through a divorce since 2015. His life shifted. He realized he had few deep conversations with people. He had achieved “Success” but not

“Significance.” He speaks of the quest in the U.S. to be “Happy.” But a narcissist can be happy because it is all about him or her. Happiness is our pursuit of the 1<sup>st</sup> mountain. We are happy when our team wins, we get a promotion, or get what we want. The U.S. has become increasingly focused on being “Happy.” It’s about ME. He contrasts happiness with JOY. Joy is based on something deeper. It is not about ME; it is about US. It is about community not isolation. “I’m happy when I get what I want.” That’s why people are so Unhappy. We don’t get what we want, and we are angry, bitter, mean, toxic. Joy moves us from the focus on ME to the focus on community. It is not about grabbing but about giving. When we go to heaven, we won’t be alone. Heaven is community. Even God, the Trinity, is Community. What do I want you to do? I want you to sit on the 3-legged stool. Personal, small group, corporate. We can help you find your way. If you’d like directions on how to pray or how to be in a small group, we can help. But you need to be with us every Sunday in worship. *“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works – not 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.”*