

## Drawing Near to Persevere - Hebrews 10:11-25

Pastor Chad 0:03

Stuart MacLean on his CBC radio show called The Vinyl Cafe once did a broadcast extolling the virtues of newspapers. He said that as a child his day was bracketed in newsprint. It came in the front door in the morning, where the paper would be separated in the front section go to his father and then he and his brother would argue over the sports section and the comics. Sometimes if there was time, they would trade. There was also a second newspaper delivery in the afternoon and he said, That was when it would show up like a like a dinner guest at about 430 or five o'clock and they would sit down in the living room, his father in his chair with a whiskey in hand and his kids on the living room floor going through these different things. He says how his father's newspaper was always full of crooks and robbers and it seemed as though his newspaper was full of the stories and there was this mumbled commentary about it even though during the day his father didn't seem to live as though the world was full of liars and crooks, but he said his newspaper was different. It was full of enticing stories of sports heroes and different kinds of games and, and exciting things that have happened, and advertisements about movies that he probably wouldn't be able to see yet. Endless want ads, which he hoovered up, he says particularly the the pets for sale. He said he followed those in the same way that he used to follow political affairs as he got older. And then he says at the end of the day, they would take the newspaper and they would wrap up their garbage and they would throw it in the steel garbage cans. They didn't have plastic bags at that point. And so he wrapped his garbage in newspaper and his day was bracketed by this newsprint.

He says this was important for a couple of reasons. First is that newspapers exist in space, not in time. They happen out of time. In fact, he says they literally stopped time. Every day the newspaper jams its wrench in the cogs of the clock and says, This is what it's like right now. And by doing that, it asks that of all of us and asks us to step out of time to and to consider things that are happening and what they might mean to us and to others, but to think about all of that. The other thing The second thing, and perhaps the most important thing, he said, is that a newspaper is a shared experience. On so many levels on every level. Not only the shared experience of a boy listening to his father grumble about the news or two brothers squabbling about the sections, I'll trade you. There's all that. But there is more when our cities are full of newspapers, they are quite literally on every corner. And that means you don't even have to read them to know what they're all about. You just have to walk around and they'll seep into

you like ink spilled on a blotter, and in the spilling, they'll stain your mind and that means we are all ink stain.

Those of us who read the papers and those of us who don't, and this is the most important part, we are stained with the same stories because of all that is living together can carry on a common conversation. Now this is intensely important. He says this act of sharing an experience is arguably as important as the experience itself more important, maybe. It's not what it is. It's just that it is for it is in the sharing that we foster fellowship and that is what creates community. If everyone had their own private newspapers as the webmasters would have, if we all travel on cruise control, we may be just as well informed, quite possibly better informed, but will become a society of solitudes. Each of us lost on our private prejudices and rather than argue about what might or might not be in the common good, we drift away to the islands of single issues, and soon we lost in the forest of alienation. And soon enough, instead of grumbling, that the paper will be grumbling at each other.

It almost sounds like a prophet, doesn't he? That's the only important part of this. And the reason why I'm sharing this story is because he says the act of sharing is arguably as important as the experience itself, for it is sharing the foster fellowship, and that is what creates community and I would argue that is exactly what the writer to the Hebrews is saying needs to continue to happen for the readers of his letter. Why he says in verse 25, let us not give up meeting together as something that as are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another. Can't help but notice that our world seems to be more and more divided, partly because we don't connect or consume the same stories anymore. We don't listen to the same news station and have the same broadcaster telling us the state of the world. We don't have the same newspapers or the same news providers and we, we all go to our own individual spaces, often surrounded by our own individual friends who, who continue to tell us the same kinds of things that we have always been thinking and so we end up perpetuating the prejudices that we already have, no longer challenge to step outside of time as Stuart McLean says.

More than this, the writer to the Hebrews recognizes that we are shaped by stories; are what we consume. And that is why he urges them to continue to be together because when they no longer meet together, they no longer share the same stories. They don't hear the incredible good news about who Jesus is, the old old story of Jesus and His love and instead they hear stories from others from previous friends or from family members who are still within Judaism and don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah,

telling them that they are mistaken that he couldn't possibly be and then it might start to seep into their bones and they might start to go back to that. It's more than just a common conversation. We are actually shaped by what we consume. Christians have long understood this importance, which is why the writer to the Hebrews as he starts to make an application to his sermon, remember, this is one long sermon. And so he's been going through exactly how Jesus is superior to everything had ever come before. And now he's switching to an application. It's the so what So what does this mean? Because Jesus is superior to all of us. He says, Therefore, in chapter 10, verse 19, brothers and sisters, since we have the 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 high priest over the house of God, let us then draw near to God. Now this is amazing, because normally we would have been kept away because of the curtain. We talked about this plenty that the curtain that separated the people from the Most Holy Place, which is the symbolic place of where God dwells, that was separate God was separate. He was not to be confidently approached, and yet writer says we can confidently approach God with a sincere heart and a full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water and let us then unfold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.

Christians have long understood the importance of meeting together and being shaped by the same story. So let's take a moment and go through these verses and see just how many first person plural pronouns this writer uses; how many times he says us and we. Since we have confidence, enter the Most Holy Place by new and living way opened up 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 hearts, then with a 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 then hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for you promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward 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, sometimes people wonder why they should be a part of a community, a church community particularly, and in this time of COVID, when there's so many different options out there, there's so many different online services that you can watch. Why would you bother watching this one? It's not nearly as good as some of the others in terms of production. Of course, the content is just as good if not better. I'm just I'm joking. joking. But why would we choose to stay connected to our community.

And why would you even bother with a community at all? There's a lot of people who say, well, Christians can be Christians, they can connect with God anywhere they are, after all, doesn't the Reformation say that we are all prophets, priests and kings. We can read the Bible for ourselves, you can buy all of the same kinds of commentaries that I used to write my sermons that Dayna uses to write her sermons, you can have access to all of the same kind of information that we do. So why would you listen to one particular person sharing a particular message? Why would you commit to one particular community particularly where the community might become messy when there are people in that community who may have hurt you in the past when there's a history there when there's people within that community who don't necessarily live up to what they say they believe? Why then?

The writer makes it clear that Christianity is not a solo affair, but a communal one. As Paul says, in other places, when we believe in the Lord Jesus, we become a part of the family of God, we become a part of a particular community. Some of the theologians, people like Augustin and others have said that there is no salvation outside of the church. Now, that doesn't mean that the church as an institution declares who is saved and who is not. It means that we cannot be saved or be a part of God's family and not be connected to a physical community in a particular place. Because we are shaped by the stories, the inputs that we have, in that particular place by the people that we interact with there. Our faith becomes real when we interact with real people, sometimes a real problems.

Now this brings up a question for many of us, particularly in this time of COVID. Because we're not necessarily able to gather as you were before, and some of us have worries that maybe the government is trying to shut us down as presumed by closing our churches. So I don't particularly believe that although I know that the evil one is continually trying to shut churches and to close different things. But in this timeframe, of course, the message has still been getting out. You're still watching this. We're still gathering together as Christians in different ways, for sure, but hopefully, you're still connecting with others who are a part of this community. But at the same time, we have noticed that we don't necessarily have the same kinds of shared experiences. We're not necessarily in the same place having the same kind of worship experience. singing the same kinds of songs and doing the same kinds of things. Some of us participate in this at different times and in different ways.

So how then can we stay connected and gather in a way or at least keep ourselves connected to this community by feeding ourselves with the same kind of inputs by sharing of ourselves with others and serving them and by continuing to build the same kinds of relationships. We should stay connected and to do so safely. And one of the things I've been really impressed about in this community is the way in which we have been willing to be patient than to sacrifice the things that we want in order for the good of others. We've been aware of the fact that maybe we don't all see eye to eye about this particular issue. But by the same token, we're very happy to make concessions on our opinions in order to create space for those for whom this might actually turn out to be a problem. Luckily, we've been saved from having any cases within our community up until now, but that may or may not continue. So this is why Dayna and I then have been working on doing different kinds of things. This is why we're doing live services in the church to try to re-gather people in certain ways and why that service is we try to have it as close to what the online service as possible the sermons are essentially the same, although, since I don't use a manuscript, it's not exactly identical.

But this is why we have been working to create a service outline and sermon transcript or manuscript and information for those who can't and aren't connected online who can't watch these services. It says, well, then we made sure that they receive a package. So they at least are able to read and to experience the same stories and the same kinds of things that everybody else is. So one of the reasons that I let weird things happen like my dog coming in, No, I'm just kidding. That was totally an accident when my dog showed up in the screen, but what it has proven is that it's a shared experience. So many people have told me about that and have talked about it and have laughed about it with others, that it helps to create that shared experience. This is also why Dayna and I have been working on our daily devotions, or not necessarily daily now that we've been on vacation or on continuing education, but these little short morning devotions or these devotionals that we've been doing posting on YouTube and then linking or posting on YouTube and on Instagram or linking to Facebook so that we again can be shaped by the same kinds of things. We as individuals, in this particular community then can pay attention to and hear the same story. This is also why we started the podcast. If you didn't know that we had a podcast, that Dayna and I had a podcast. Now you do, we've had about three episodes so far, the link I believe is on the website, you can find it up if you can't figure that out. So you can contact the office, and I'm sure they'll let you know how to get in touch with it. But we're going through a book called Liturgy of the Ordinary. And we're just talking about how that intersects with our lives with what we're hearing in the media and in other places and with how it might connect with you as well. This is also why we're considering at this point, live

streaming our worship services because we know that this situation won't necessarily go away right away and many of you are going to stay disconnected from worshipping here in this space for a while for your own safety or maybe for the safety of others, but we would like to provide as much of a unified experience for everybody as possible. So we're looking at the possibility here, the ways to make a good quality live streaming broadcasts from this particular space again.

Now, we're working to create shared experiences, because the way that we consume information or experience things shapes our lives. So I have a question for you. Do you pay attention to how what you consume shapes you? Do you pay attention to the amount of information about the COVID pandemic that you are consuming? Something that often kind of contributes to a culture of fear. On the other hand, do you pay attention to how much you're reading that kind of sees this all as a conspiracy theory and it's not really a problem. It's important to think through both of these things. And I'm not saying that you need to avoid them. But we do need to think through all aspects of a particular problem. And the bigger question, I think, for us as Christians is do you pay attention to the amount that you consume of Christian information? And is that more than or at least significantly more impactful in your life than the other things that you consume?

Michael Hyatt who's a leadership guru at a coach says that our character is shaped by three different kinds of things the input we consume, says like computer texts like to say garbage in, garbage out, whatever you put in, it's the same kind of thing you're going to get. We need to be careful about what we consume. The relationships we pursue. Which is why a community is so important and it's important for us to stay connected. And for you to be able to stay connected to people within this church in whatever way you can, again, maintaining safety, but doing so to continue to build relationships. And the habits we develop the ways in which we continue to cultivate a certain way of life.

Now, this is good advice for everyone. And if you're a non Christian, I can encourage you to think through the ways in which the inputs that you consume shapes your character, but as a Christian, this is extremely important not only because it shapes us as individuals, but because we are called to be a community that shares a particular kind of message. And at this point in the world, our message is more important than ever because it is a message of hope, and of confidence. The world needs our message more than ever, as it says in verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have the confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, verse 22.

He says, Let us draw near to God and then in verse 23, let us then hold unswervingly to the hope. we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

In a world that is full of all kinds of skepticism and doubt, a world that doesn't necessarily think that things are going to get better or that someone is in control who wants what's best for us. The world needs a message of confidence and hope that we can give that we know one who is on the throne and he has what is best in mind for us, and He will make it happen in our lives, even if we don't always understand and even if we complain, and we argue with him about what it looks in our lives, ultimately we can trust that that is the case. Sometimes our hope is hard to come by. And things happen in our lives that make it difficult, which is why he calls us to cling to it, to hold unswervingly to it. Our hope is secure because he who promised is faithful. So in this time, I would encourage you to be very intensely intentional about the input you consume about the ways in which you connect with people. And if you are a Christian that is a part of this Woody Nook Christian Reformed Church, I would encourage you then to find ways to stay connected to this community, to continue to be shaped by the stories that we share together by the relationships that are developed here because of this place, not necessarily in this room or in this building, but because of this place. We need to be intentional about being shaped by this story that Jesus is superior to everything it's we should not go away from him connecting with and being shaped by the people of this community. Because the act of sharing an experience, Stuart MacLean says, is as important or maybe more important than the experience itself, the act of sharing the old old story of who Jesus is for us, is as important to build our community as the story itself.

Therefore brothers and sisters, since we have a confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us then draw near to God in full assurance that faith brings with a sincere heart, having our bodies washed with pure water. So, let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess for he who promised his faithful let us then continue to consider how we may spur one another on 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 as we see the reality that the world is still broken and God is going to come and make all things new. We long for his return. We know when he comes, it will be for our salvation. And in the meantime, let us continue to find ways to be shaped by the same story. To share the same experiences and to spur or encourage one another or to love and good deeds. Amen

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