

### 3. Spur One Another On

If I ask who the fastest man in history is, you say: Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt.

In 2009 Usain Bolt set the world record for the 100-meter sprint with a time of 9.58 seconds. He also holds the 200m world record with a time of 19.19 seconds.

But do you know who the second fastest man in history is? Arguably Bolt's fellow countryman and training partner, Yohan Blake.

Blake holds the second fastest time ever for the 200m, and ties for the second fastest 100m time at 9.69 seconds.

And it seems that their intense rivalry pushed them both to greater heights. Coming into the 2012 Olympics, Blake had beaten Bolt at the Olympic trials in both the 100 and 200m. The stage was set for a showdown.

Ultimately in the Olympic final, Bolt and Blake finished first and second respectively in both the 100m and 200m. Usain Bolt said this about Yohan Blake:

*"Over the years, Yohan has made me a better athlete. He really pushed me and kept me on my toes."*

As we open the Bible this morning, we are going to think about the way we can push one another, the way we can keep one another on our toes as Christians. Because our passage today is all about *'how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds'*, as it says in Hebrews 10:24.

So that's our theme for today – spurring one another on. Why don't we pray and then we'll see what the Bible has to say about the topic.

*Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the chance to meet together today, even as we meet online. We pray that you would speak to us today through your word, that you would encourage us, that you would spur us on, and that you would teach us how to encourage one another. We pray that you would use this time now to grow us as your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

So we are into our third week now of the Draw Near series. This series is all about getting our focus right as we head into a new year, about making deliberate choices to draw near to God. And we've taken our instructions from Hebrews 10:19-25.

### Together

But I don't know if you noticed something over the last two weeks. As we've worked through Hebrews 10, I've mainly spoken about our *personal* response to the gospel. But the writer to the Hebrews is

concerned not just for us as individuals, but as God's people *together*. These instructions are for God's people to take on *together*, to work at *together*, to put at the center of our church life and our fellowship *together*.

So as I read the passage again today, I want you to notice the repeated pattern that the author uses with the phrase 'let us':

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>**let us** draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.<sup>23</sup> **Let us** hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And **let us** consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...

The writer to the Hebrews wants us, the church, to think about how we can encourage one another in the faith.

This is not a new idea in the New Testament. The New Testament is full of 'one another' statements, all pointing out the ways that Christians should live out faith *together*. Christianity is not primarily an individualistic faith. It's not just about you and God, nor just something to be kept private between you and him. Our faith in Jesus is something that changes who we are, and changes the way we live in the world, as God transforms us and renews us by the power of the Holy Spirit and makes us more like Jesus.

Because becoming a Christian means becoming part of a family, being adopted as sons and daughters of God and being placed in the family of God's people. That's what the church is. A little family of God, where we belong to one another, where we choose to relate to one another, where we look after one another, where we love one another.

Puritan John Wesley said: "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." Another commentator said that "selfish Christianity is a contradiction in terms."

As Christians, we are made to live lives with *one another* and for *one another*. We are 'one another' people.

And that's because our God is a 'one another' God. The trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in eternal relationship with one another, and God has made us in his image – we are made for relationships. I preached a sermon on that last year in our Genesis series. I'll put a link to it in case you'd like to go back and listen.

But big idea number one is this – the exhortation in Hebrews 10:24 is for all of us. God wants us as a church to hear this encouragement, this command, as something that is important for us as a fellowship. If we all do it, it makes it easier for the rest of us.

I was part of a cycling group back in Australia. It started with friends from church, but we ended up with lots of members from various backgrounds. We rode on Wednesday and Friday mornings at 5:20am. That meant starting in the dark 51 weeks of the year. It meant riding in the dead of winter when temperatures were just above freezing. But there was something about not letting the team down. When my alarm went off at 5:00, I knew that a bunch of other men also had alarms going off, that they were also thinking about hitting snooze and pulling the covers up. But every time I got to the meeting place, there were always other men who had chosen to put on the team kit, and to turn up. That group of men was one of the great encouragements of my life, as we pushed each other on the bicycle and in faith, as we took our turns at the front, and as we rode alongside those who were doing it tough.

Together we achieved things few of us could have achieved on our own...

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*

## **Love**

What does love for one another look like in the church?

To answer that question I want to take us to Colossians 3 where we find a list of ways that we can love one another, a list of loving qualities that any church would aspire to. And we'll get to that list in a minute.

Because the list by itself is not enough. What we really need is deep, personal transformation. The kind of transformation I spoke about a few minutes ago where God takes your life and radically transforms you from the person who you were without Christ, into the person you become when your life is hidden with Christ, as Paul describes us in Colossians 3:3. When we put off our old self, and put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of the Creator (Colossians 3:9-10).

Love comes from being transformed and reshaped and remade into the kind of people that God made us to be.

And if that is what is happening to us on the inside, of course we expect that transformation to be visible from the outside.

So what does love look like in practice?

Firstly it means we don't look at the differences between us, we look at our status in Christ: (Colossians 3:11)

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

The church in Colossae included people from many backgrounds – Jews who had put their faith in Jesus, as well as many non-Jews (or Gentiles) from all kinds of backgrounds. Traditionally Jews had separated themselves from every other race. But now Paul is telling them that there should be no religious divide between them. No socio-economic divide – that is, not recognizing some as slaves and treating them as

lower in honor than those who were free. And no ethnic divide. Even the barbarians and Scythians (Nomadic people from the Baltic known for their savagery) – even they were to be included in the church because of the unity that we have in Christ.

For us here in the Napa Valley, the same command applies. Loving one another like Christ in this church means we won't judge one another by race, or ethnicity, or our status in society. We won't treat some people better and some as lesser based on the world's judgments. Instead we'll allow the love of Christ to transform the way we see one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Family.

And that will be especially important as we reopen our church building in a few months' time. As (God willing!) we welcome dozens and scores and hundreds of new brothers and sisters in Christ into our family here. We won't all be the same. I pray that our church will be made up of people from every tribe and nation and tongue. Because that's a picture of the church gathered around Jesus on the last day. No longer different tribes but instead the chosen people of God:

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Col 3:12)

So the love of Christ will transform the way we see one another. And the love of Christ will transform the way we treat one another as well.

We will clothe ourselves in a transformed attitude, putting on the new self as Paul described it back in v10.

We love watching movies about American football. The plot is always a variation on the same theme – the second string quarterback who is thrust into the limelight, the overlooked player who works hard to become a champion, or the player who perseveres through adversity until they are picked. That's invariably the plotline. But there is always a moment when that player is allowed to dress for the team for the first time. The uniform goes on and they belong to something bigger than themselves. They are part of the team and everyone is counting on them.

Paul says as the church we have been chosen to dress for the biggest team there is. We've been invited into God's chosen people, made holy for a life of service to God, and dearly beloved by him. And we are to put on an attitude that fits who we are in Christ. And who we are becoming.

Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Gentleness. Patience.

Every one of these attitudes is about the way we treat *other people*.

**Compassion** is about feeling it when others are hurting. The Bible describes it as rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). When we love someone deeply, it hurts us to see them hurting. That's compassion.

**Kindness** is about considering others. Being friendly, generous. Merciful. Choosing love rather than indifference. Love rather than judgment. And that's the way God has treated us – with loving kindness despite our many failings (c.f. Titus 3:4; Romans 2:4)

We're to clothe ourselves in **humility**, just like Jesus. With gentleness. And patience.

All of these attributes could describe Jesus, couldn't they? Because Jesus shares the same character as his Father. And by the Holy Spirit, he is sharing that character with us, encouraging us to put those characteristics on more and more.

But this passage reminds us that alongside the internal transformation, we can make the choice to transform the outside as well.

<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Col 3:13)

Church is a family and families can be complicated. Relationships can be complicated. And that's the same in the church family. And there is nothing new about that. The early church was just like the modern church, which is why Paul needed to write these words to a church that was probably only 10 years old. Because even though we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ, we so easily revert to the old self, to old ways, to old behaviours, and to old sins. Even in church we sin against one another – not intentionally I hope – but just as a fact of being 'unfinished people living in a broken world and still in need of God's forgiving and transforming grace'.<sup>1</sup>

And the church presents an excellent opportunity to work on our godliness – as we bear with one another, learning to forgive and extend mercy, to work through differences, to choose love rather than holding a grudge. That is some of the work that God is doing in us as we come together in the church.

Commentator Raymond Brown puts it like this:

The church's defects present us with an opportunity for earnest prayer, careful thought, loving discussion and united action to correct the deficiencies and not run away from them.

We all come to church with baggage. With wounds. Some old. Some still fresh. And no doubt we will cause new wounds in the coming months and years. That goes with the territory. The real question is what will we do with those wounds? How will we deal with them when they arise?

With love, I hope.

Paul says:

<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col 3:14)

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul David Tripp, Lead; 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church (p44)

The list of virtues above, it's a list that only works when they're done in love. As we pursue kindness and compassion and humility, they teach us to love the ones we're serving. They teach us to think outside ourselves. To consider the other person. That's how we learn to love people who are different from ourselves. By deliberately choosing to love through the attitudes that we put on.

## **Good Deeds**

Coming back to Hebrews 10:24, the second part of the writer's exhortation was this:

let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love **and good deeds**

Love and good deeds go hand in hand. Some commentators suggest that there are no good deeds without love, and I think they're right. Whatever good works we do as a church, they will be a direct expression of the love that we have for others.

So what kind of good deeds is the writer to the Hebrews taking about? What kind of loving good deeds should we be spurring one another on toward?

Well, we don't find an answer here in Hebrews. But looking through the Old and New Testament, we find hundreds of ways to show love and to care for one another. And perhaps that's why the writer starts his exhortation with: ***let us consider how we may spur one another on...***

It's our job as a church to discuss the best ways for our church community to express love. Loving good deeds might be different here in the Napa Valley compared to an inner-city church, or a church in another country. What does loving one another practically look like here at Yountville Community Church?

I'm not sure of the answer. But I look forward to the discussion, and the prayerful, thoughtful work that goes alongside it. And I look forward to many of you stepping up to volunteer as we express our love in good deeds, and as we show the love of Jesus in our church and in our community.

Because at the end of the day, our loving good deeds are an expression of God's loving good deeds in our lives. We love because we've been shown love. We love because we're being made more and more like Jesus everyday. We love because it's who we are in Christ.

PAUSE

So as we go into the week ahead, take a moment to consider how you will spur our church on toward love and good deeds. Will it be by stopping to pray for someone? Will it be by making a phone call to someone you haven't seen since COVID separated us almost a year ago? Will you encourage someone with Scripture, or a card, or a note in the mail? Will you compliment someone for a godly attitude or behavior you've noticed in them? Will you apologise for a wound you've caused?

***How will we spur one another on toward love and good deeds?***

Why don't we pray that God would help us to do that?