

“I Love Sundays”
Psalm 100; Hebrews 10:19-25

- 19** Therefore, brothers and sisters,
since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,
20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,
21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,
having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience
and having our bodies washed with pure water.
23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,
25 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.

Introduction

For over 20 years, Rev. Hal Seed has been pastor for New Song Community Church in Oceanside, CA. He is the one who put together this thematic emphasis “I Love Sundays” with the tag, “Make Sunday the best day of your week.” It’s not rocket science or quantum physics. But it makes sense for us to share it here at First Pres. Our pastors, staff and elders, of course, want First Pres to be a vital, important family of faith for longtime members, for those new to the church and everyone in between. We would want our children, youth, and adults to say, “I Love Sundays.”

We have developed a congregational survey to ask you, “As a member, friend or guest, what’s important to you about this church?” Have a look at the first question: “What activities are important to you in your own personal growth in Christ?” Sunday Worship? Personal Bible Study? Music? Community Service? etc. Question #4 asks, “How often do you participate in what is offered in and through the church?”

How are we doing as a church? We can guess what’s important but it will help us in a big way to have the information that the survey will supply. So, please fill out the survey either right now here in worship today (it can even be an act of worship as the ushers receive the morning offering and collect completed surveys; or after worship come up and place yours on the communion table). Or, you can take it home, think about it, pray about it and return it next week or mail it to the church office. Or, you can do the survey online on SurveyMonkey.com. The web address is on the announcement page of your program. www.surveymonkey.com/r/FPCSLC-Jan2016

We will offer the survey here at church this morning and the next two Sundays. Hopefully by the end of January we will have 250 to 300 responses. A big thank you in advance for giving your valuable feedback for the well-being of First Pres.

I. What We Are Invited to Do (vs. 24-25)

Because, in the Bible, in our scripture reading, in Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 25, God's word invites us to (quote) "Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." In other words, let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out. "Not giving up meeting together," it says, "as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more." Worshiping together, spurring each other on, especially as we see the final Day approaching. This is what the Lord invites us to do: spur one another on; encourage one another.

So, what are Sundays like for you, generally? Church attendance and involvement have been in decline in the United States over the past 30-40 years. That's one whole generation. Somehow the church, the Christian community is missing the mark.

Clearly, our Lord wants the gathering of Christians, their friends and guests to enjoy being together. The Sunday experience at church can be helpful for the week to come, for good connections in your family. Sundays help us see how God wants us to bring positive change in our world, and especially can give our lives the eternal perspective that Christ offers.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way. If we surveyed people at work or school or neighborhood and asked people to describe "church" in one word, what would be the number one response? "Church is... Boring." If that's your answer on our survey, please let us know what we might do to change it up. If your Sundays here are positive experiences, let us know how and why.

"I love Sundays" because I get to be with you, my friends, my Christian family. We get to worship the Lord together. We sing, we pray, we share our life of faith in Christ. Like you, I need it and enjoy it when someone "spurs me on to love and good deeds," when someone encourages me.

I hope First Pres can be that church for you and for others we invite or for people who just come by on a Sunday to see what this congregation is like.

II. Why Come to Church? (vs. 19-23)

This passage in Hebrews 10 also answers the question of why come to church. "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us." We can now - without hesitation - walk right up to God, into "the Holy Place." Jesus has cleared the way.

This is the main thing about church, about religion, about faith, about Christianity. If you miss this, you have missed the whole point.

God the Almighty One is the Creator of all things including you and me. In the goodness of God, he has blessed us with the gift of life. Don't take the miraculous nature of life for granted. Astrophysicists say there are 322 parameters needed for life to exist. There's less than 1 chance in 10 to the 280th power

(that's 1 in the millions and trillions,) that even one life-support body would occur anywhere in the universe (odds way more than winning the \$900 million power ball). "I Love Sundays" because we can praise our wonderful God together.

Famous physicist/cosmologist Stephen Hawking said, "In this talk, I would like to speculate a little, on the development of life in the universe, and in particular, the development of intelligent life. I shall take this to include the human race, even though much of its behavior throughout history has been pretty stupid, and not calculated to aid the survival of the species." I think he is describing, perhaps unwittingly, the problem of sin. We human beings continue to make a mess of the world.

With God's good creation of life, we human beings, every one of us, make a mess of it. In our self-centeredness, we rebel against God, take charge, and live the way we want to live, not in God's ways. The Bible tells us how sin separates us from God and will ultimately separate us from anything good. Call it what you will: damned, hell bound, lost. Under God's righteous, holy judgment, you and I would be held responsible for our sins. Much of this Book is about people who reject God and end up rejected by the Lord. Go down a few verses to Hebrews 10:31. It tells how "It is a dreadful, terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

But here comes the amazing grace, the good news of Jesus Christ and the church: "Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." With faith in Jesus, know that he is both our high priest and the very sacrifice for our sins. God's word encourages us! Let's do it - full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out. This is God's mercy, this is forgiveness, this is the gift of new life. Don't miss it.

The word "priest" in Latin (the language of the church for centuries) is "pontifex." It means "bridge builder." You may remember a parable of Jesus when Father Abraham says to the rich man, "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." Without Jesus, there is no hope. But God is the bridge builder and Jesus is the bridge. In the loving-kindness of God, he has provided the solution to the human problem. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). You and can cross over from death to life.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Sundays affirm the reason to come to church and how we then can live in the sure hope of God's faithfulness. "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word.

Conclusion

Christian group Mercy Me has a song on their 2014 album *Welcome to the New* titled "Greater."

Here are the opening lyrics:

"Bring your tired/ And bring your shame/ Bring your guilt/ And bring your pain/
Don't you know that's not your name/ You will always be much more to me."

"Every day I wrestle with the voices/ That keep telling me I'm not right/ But that's alright...
'Cause I hear a voice and He calls me redeemed/ When others say I'll never be enough/
And greater is the One living inside of me/ Than he who is living in the world."

"I Love Sundays." I hope you do as well. And I hope you will spur others on, encourage others to make Sunday the best day of the week.

Let us pray for that.

Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;

his faithfulness continues through all generations.