

SERMON: "ABOUT WORSHIP ... WE GATHER TOGETHER"
TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 95 and ISAIAH 6:1-8
NEW TESTAMENT HEBREWS 10:19-25

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Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

A couple months ago, we did a moment for ministry about the need for two more people on the nominating committee. We got two volunteers that day. Last week, we did another moment for ministry from the nominating committee about needing three elders and one deacon. We got three volunteers for elder that same day. That's some momentum there, some mojo.

So tapping into that winning streak, let me mention one other need. Can you turn around please? You see the people back there running the sound the livestream and the power point? Hi Randy. Can we get a few of you to help them on occasion? It is important work, makes worship happen. If you're interested in helping please see Randy in the back after worship

There are lots of people who help put together our worship service
The church office putting the bulletin together; the music ministry helping select the music, rehearsing, leading worship; ushers, people preparing and serving communion and the people behind you doing audio and video and who make online worship possible

Randy and the crew have one other very important job, very important.
Randy has his finger on the mute button. He is the lifeguard who saves you from hearing my singing during the hymns. Need the mic on for the sermon and off for the hymn that follows. Maybe you've heard me singing before

What happens when the mic is not muted? My off key singing overwhelms the congregational singing we should be hearing. The microphone lifts up one individual voice over our voices together. And when that individual voice is mine, it is not pretty. We can give you a sample. How about we leave my mic on during the second verse of the middle hymn this morning (just that one verse, please)

We're just beginning this sermon series on worship. The first sermon was about being called to worship all the time and everywhere. Most of that worship, that sense of awe and reverence, is individual – a solo. I certainly want to encourage that daily praise. This morning we shift to the congregation, to being called together, to making it a habit to gather together.

PROVOCATIVE

Our New Testament Lesson is from the Letter to the Hebrews

Like most of the letters in the New Testament it is written to a group of people, a community, a congregation (probably a group of Jewish Christians in Rome)

There are a few New Testament letters written to individuals - Timothy, Titus but most are to congregations. Christianity is best understood as plural

This letter is a whole bunch of exhortation and encouragement, meant to motivate and rejuvenate weary Christians. You ever get tired? Tired of the pilgrimage that is our faith journey? Maybe think, "how bout we skip this Sunday?"

The weather is too bad to go to church (or too nice to be in church)?

The author encourages them (and us) with a reminder of what Jesus has done for us
We can approach the God of heaven and earth because of Jesus

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary 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 approach 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 to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching

That encouragement includes several versions of 'let us'

Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds
not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.

I want to focus on that last kind of "let us," if you will, understanding that it is built on the first two – the full assurance of faith and hope that we have because of what Jesus has done for us through his self-sacrifice

We gather together because of what Jesus has done. He calls us together

I just love how the word provoke is used in these verses.

It seems to me that the algorithms that hold sway over what we hear and read (and believe) are designed to be provocative, but not in the way it is used here

The provocations of our time seem designed to rile us up - clenched fists

Here we are provoking one another to love and good deeds

including a reminder to make it habit to meet together – open hands

A GROUP PROJECT

Just a note here. I'm going to have to use that in a funeral service someday soon
What a great way to remember someone. 'They provoked others to love
and good deeds.' Looking around I see many a family member where I wish
I would have thought to say that about your loved one now in heaven. It fits!

Preaching a sermon about worship, about being gathered together to worship
about making it a habit to gather together ... I hope I am being provocative
I'll try this for provocation. Christianity is not a "do it yourself" project
It begins with what Christ has done – Christ first. Then it is a group project
That is especially true when it comes to worship

Worship is meant to be both / and ... what we do as individuals and as a group
Meant to work in harmony with the individual blending in with the larger group
not with one voice, one person acting (or singing) like it is all about them
Are you looking forward to hearing me sing?

So called "rugged individualism" is one of the characteristics of being an American
A critical part of the American dream that leads us all to trust in the belief
that we all have the opportunity to achieve our dreams. It has fueled our growth
That being true, we're wise to admit our strengths are often our weaknesses too
Lots of lone rangers among us doing it their way ... lone rangers who are lonely

Following Christ is a walk with others. That is how it is meant to work - by God's design
Jesus' invitation to follow him is an invitation to join, to be a part of
Yes, worship is something we are called to do all the time and everywhere
And worship is what we are called to do together. So we gather together

The psalms are full of calls to worship, calls to gather together, to sing together
The psalm this morning, Psalm 95, is one of those psalms

**O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock
of our salvation! Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to the Lord with songs of praise! For the LORD
is a great God and a great King above all gods.**

More 'let us.' O come let us sing to the Lord. Let us come into God's presence
Think church bells in the days of old ringing so as to call people together
I remember the drums doing just that each morning now some 40 years ago
when we were on campus for a week at the seminary in Accra, Ghana.
"Come all ye people, come and praise your maker."

Prompt small group to sing the hymn one time through

SUMMARY

That sounds so good. Thought it would be fun to get someone who can sing and sing well to chime in with some sweet sounds before I sing in a little bit
About that, I do often use self-deprecating humor when talking about my singing
I best be careful with that. I don't want to scare the song out of you.

I told you before about the one time my mom, Annie, got it wrong.
We were all together in church – my parents and their three boys
I was home from seminary, full of the Holy Ghost you might say
We were singing the opening hymn ... and I was belting it out
My mom leaned forward, got my attention and shook her head
like a baseball pitcher waving off a pitch called by the catcher

No, I don't have the best singing voice ... but I should still sing, even belt it out
God does call us together, all of us with our varied gifts (and areas where we are not so gifted). "Hey, Dave. For the youth choir trip. We think you'd be a great narrator." I've been the narrator many times since.

We are called to gather together (all of us) to make a joyful noise to the Lord
That call brings together a great choir – some quite comfortable holding a mic and singing into it, some who hold a microphone too far from their mouth and ask more than a few times, "Can everybody hear me?"

The call to worship gathers together soloists, accompanists, and background singers who might specialize in "yeah." That call to worship also gathers together narrators, people singing along in the pews and people in the back working the sound and PowerPoint. All are welcome. All are called. All are needed.

So then, that call to gather together for worship, might sound like a combination of the psalm and the passage from Hebrews
We might put together, make a salad out of, all those "let us" in this morning's scripture lessons. From Psalm 96

O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to the Lord with songs of praise!

And from the letter to the Hebrews
let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ...