

February 1, 2009 Part 2 of series on Membership Vows

“Presence: Why Yours Is Important” Hebrews 10:19-25 Psalm 90

Last week we began the series of teachings based in our Membership Vows to uphold and support the local church by our Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness. How many of you who were here last week chose to take a better look at your prayer life and decided it might need some tweaking? Did any of you contemplate what you might be able to do to enhance the dialog between you and God through prayer? I hope some of you did.

This morning we are going to address ‘your presence’ and why your presence in church is important. Being present in church is important not only for ourselves but is at least as important for others who gather here as well.

When I was a kid, one of my friends and I would make up this really great roster of famous baseball players – Carlton Fisk, Harmon Killebrew, Johnny Bench, Dennis McClain, Stormin’ Norman Cash, Rod Carew and the like. My Dad used to just shake his head when he mowed the grass because there was a dug up patch of yard for the batter’s box and always a slab of wood ‘on the mound’ along with a well worn diamond *in his front yard*. We would play for hours, just the two of us dreaming and moving a lineup around; we even broke at least two windows if I remember right. It was great, not a soul to bother us, just mom calling us to lunch.

While it was great for a couple of grubby boys to play at baseball all day, imagine if either of us had grown to be really good and we went to the ball park and there was that same crowd gathered as there was in the yard. No adoring fans to be seen. It would be devastating wouldn't it? Spring Training for the Majors is just around the corner. What if no one went to Spring Training games? What would it be like for the rookies in particular? Who would be there to provide the incentive to play hard? Who would provide the excitement, the enthusiasm that keeps one going when it looks like they'll be sent to the minors?

Now baseball may be a poor analogy for the church but there are some common threads. On a most basic level, what happens when folks come in the door and there's hardly anyone present? How many would you say are thinking, "Yeah, baby, nobody here today, I get the preacher all to myself?" It is tough to stick it out when you don't feel like anyone else cares. That is one reason to be here; to just support each other in that basic human level.

We are however going to talk about some other important reasons that your Presence in the church is important. The writer of Hebrews wrote, beginning in Chapter 10, verse 19 these words:

HEB 10:19 Therefore, brothers, 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 **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

“Let us not give up meeting together...” This is such an important point for us to keep in mind. Our “Presence” in the heartfelt act of worship is a testimony to our faith. There is a difference between just being somewhere and really being present isn’t there. If we just “show up” it tells one story and if we are really “present” another story is told. True worship provides a place where your soul meets with God’s Spirit. It provides a place to reflect on what God’s plan for your life is. It gives us a place to do some introspection, to remind us whose we are. Corporate worship reminds us that we are part of something much greater than ourselves. It reminds us that we are just a link in an “endless line of splendor”, part of the “great cloud of witnesses”, those faithful believers who have gone on before us.

Another reason to be Present is so that we together might hear “The Word” of God once again. Martin Luther once wrote, “Faith is an acoustical affair.” Church attendance gives us the opportunity to *hear* the Word of God proclaimed not only as a written word, but the Word made Flesh, who dwelt among us in the personhood of Jesus Christ. It is in the church where we can most often hear that

Jesus Christ, through the *proclamation* of Christ, that He is not just a great example. We are not saved by the example, but rather, we are saved by his grace – his infinite love. Christ as an example exercises our works, gives them meaning.

There are lots of folks who let many other things get in the way of regular church attendance and believe me, I have heard all kinds of reasons and excuses. Frankly, all of them sound pretty good when they come out of our mouths don't they. Now there are times when we just aren't going to be able to be here – like when we are sick or dead. When on vacation or visiting relatives or on business do you seek out a place of worship? There are times when we (my wife and I) are away that I just would rather not do that but I have discovered that my relationship with; my commitment to the Lord just doesn't allow me to blow it off. I am beckoned to worship wherever I travel and it is always good. The preaching might not be good, the music might not be good, but it is always good to be in the house of the Lord.

We need one another not only for support but we need each other, to hold each other accountable. We need to be “Present” not only for Sunday morning worship or Sunday School but in the practical work of the church. We need to be Present as the church caring for the poor, relieving debt, visiting the sick, providing for the orphans and widowed. We need to be Present in sharing our enthusiasm for those who are coming to the Lord in a new way, a deeper

understanding. We need to be “Present” as God’s children wherever we are, promoting the glory of the Lord as we practice humility and charity.

As I close this morning, I want to remind us that just being Present is not the object. The ultimate purpose of our time together as church or as a small group, even the men’s group, is not self-benefit. Rather, it is to be equipped to receive a direct commission to go into all the world, to join with our Risen Christ in the task of proclaiming God’s salvation to the world. Let us press on to the goal of the race set before us.