

“One Another”

Introduction: If you flip your worship bulletin over to the back cover, on the top of the page you will see our vision statement. It reads like this:

*Receiving and extending the hospitality of Jesus, as we connect with God, one another, and our community.*

It is a relatively new statement for us and it arose out of the church health survey, and following discussions, that we went through beginning at this time last year. Our fall sermon series, “Breaking Camp,” also emerged out of these discussions. It has led us explore passages from the book of Deuteronomy to learn what we can from the way God, through his servant Moses, prepared the Israelites to move into the Promised Land and live as a light to those around them, extending the hospitality of God—his radical welcome and grace—that they themselves had received.

If you have been with us this fall, hopefully you can begin to hear echoes of this vision statement as you think back on the ground we have covered. Ultimately, our goal, as it was for the Israelites, is to extend this hospitality of God, which comes through Jesus, to the community that is beyond our own walls. As we’ve mentioned in a variety of ways, God has rescued us not *from* the world but *for* it. And so, naturally, we need to connect with both God, to first receive his grace, and then with the community to which we are called to share such grace.

But we also need to connect with one another, and it is this piece of the statement that I’d like to focus on today. What does the person sitting next to you, what, in fact, does every person in this sanctuary, and even in our new pictorial directory, have to do with God’s call to extend the hospitality of Jesus? Simply this: we need one another to grow and to show into who and what God calls us to be, people who are maturing in their faith and revealing the radical hospitality of Jesus as we live together in community.

To emphasize this, the NT writers give us, depending on how you count them, around three dozen “one another” passages to ponder. We’ll look at a sampling, from Colossians and Hebrews, to explore how each of us is a necessary part of God’s vision, for us, and for the world.

I. Rescued into Community

A. Worth noticing is that both of these one another passages begin with the connection we have with God, that is, with what God, by his grace, has done for us. Colossians puts it like this: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . .” In the word “chosen,” we should hear overtones from the experience of Israel, now being applied to the church. God has set his affection on us, not because anything we have done but because of who God is. He has declared us to be holy and dearly loved through the process that our Hebrews passage describes, the shed blood and broken body of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus became the high priest and advocate that we need, the one who brings us into a relationship with God by taking the penalty for sin upon himself, taking away and cleansing us from everything in us and about us that is not holy.

B. But notice what comes next, in both passages. This holy and dearly loved state is not simply one we’re to float in and enjoy, somewhere out there on our own, in a “just me and Jesus” kind of way. To be sure, we are to rest in and enjoy what Jesus has done for us, but we’re also called by him to grow up in our salvation, into all that God desires us to be, through the community into which he has rescued us—the church. If there’s any doubt as to whether we’ve been rescued into a community, just consider the way Jesus taught his followers to pray. It begins

with the word “our,” a community word that continues throughout the prayer: *Our* Father, give *us*, forgive *us*, lead *us*, deliver *us*. Not singular, but plural, is the way Jesus directs us to pray, because we are to be in this life of faith with others, together.

C. Further confirmation of this can be understood through one of the primary images the NT uses to describe the church—a body. We are members of one body, Paul writes (Col. 3:15). This image of a body, if you follow it through, means that we are not members of a club, but of one another. We are not to remain independent, but to be profoundly interdependent. Paul puts it this way in Romans 12:5

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members *one of another*.

Practically, this means that we are an organism in which each of us is critical to the other. If you can think about how your whole body hurts when just one tooth aches, or how it’s difficult to walk unless all ten toes are functioning, or how tough it would be to play the piano with one arm in a sling, you begin to get the picture. We need one another. Neither Jesus, nor the NT writers, envision us living out our faith in isolation, outside of a community of faith, because we need one another to grow and to show, to grow into all God desires us to become, and to be the community that shows the radical hospitality of Jesus.

## II. Growing and Showing with One Another

A. To help us see this, and consider the way in which it works, the NT writers give us somewhere around three dozen “one another” passages. I’ve listed most on a bulletin insert so that you can reflect on them slowly, maybe even taking one a day for the next month or so, laying each before God and asking him how he might want you to put it into practice. Tim Keller, in a small group resource called “Gospel in Life,” groups these community-building practices into three large categories, affirming, sharing, and serving one another.

B. I’d like to notice three additional things about them.

1. First, they are all relational. That is, if I am going to become the kind of person Jesus wants me to be, more compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient, one who can bear with and forgive, than these are things I cannot do on my own, living the faith in isolation. We need others to rub up against us, pulling out of us, as it were, the need to respond with compassion or patience or forgiveness, instead of indifference or impatience or revenge. We cannot grow into God’s best alone.

2. Second, we’re not naturally going to want to do any of these! It’s far easier to be indifferent or impatient or unforgiving than not. And so I need others to help move me in the right direction. Hear again how Hebrews puts it:

And let us consider how to 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.

“Let us consider” is not a passive, “well, I’ll just think about it” kind of phrase. Rather, it means paying close attention to or looking closely at with the intention of doing something about it. Also, “to spur one another on” means to provide positive motivation, even if it’s a kick in the pants kind of motivation, so that we continue to participate in this community thing and not default into isolation or rugged individualism, believing that we’re just fine on our own thank you very much.

Illustration: To that end, one of the more important parts of the baptism we just celebrated is the pledge by you, the congregation, to provide a place of love, support, care, and encouragement so that the Webb family can continue to grow in their life of faith. You have promised to consider how to spur them on!

3. Third, although all of this might seem to lay out in rather linear fashion, beginning with grace and going on to love and good works, part of the encouragement we need to provide one another is to keep on circling back to grace, drawing near to God—connecting with him—daily. We need to go there because the Christian life is not a self-help program. We cannot live it on our own power. We need to regularly remind ourselves what God has done for us in Jesus, and how God continues to work within and among us by his Spirit, and how he calls us to live and grow together in community.

So what does the person sitting next to you have to do with God's call to extend the hospitality of Jesus? This community—the church—is like no other. It is the body of Christ. It is the vehicle by which God has chosen to extend his grace to others. Church is not a place we “go;” it's what we are to be. How we look, how we live, and how we love speaks volumes to a watching world. As the Day when God will restore all things comes near, may we be found a people who are working for and toward those purposes, growing in the love of God, and showing how that works to others.