

1 Peter 2:4-12, Hebrews 10:19-25
Membered
Sunday September 20, 2015

Today I am going to be teaching about “Membership” and I want to inspire you as we go into this teaching. So let’s begin with a little video called “Welcome to Church.”

PLAY VIDEO CLIP “WELCOME TO CHURCH”

Every time I see that video I am inspired and praise God that he has called you and me to be a part of such an instrument of good in this world. This video was speaking about the “Universal” Church of Jesus Christ that we say we believe in when we recite the Apostle’s Creed. And we as United Methodists have our own tale that is part of that whole.



Here’s one small example. We are part of movement to eliminate Malaria on the Continent of Africa. We call it “Imagine No Malaria.” Our Annual Conference pledged to save 200,000 lives. It takes \$10 to save a life so that’s a 2 million dollar pledge. So far, our Conference has raised \$1,434,000 with \$1,864,000 pledged. We are very close to our goal. Nationwide, the UMC is committed to raising \$75 million of which I last heard; we had raised around \$68 million. Vista has raised \$5,329.

Here at Vista Church we support ministries such as Family First, The Snack Pack Ministry for Coronado School, Fuente De La Vida Methodist church in Agua Prieta that has transformed lives and a whole Colonia. We have Creative Hands that makes clothing for those in need. We support the Hospitality Inn providing shelter for those with family members needing medical care. Our Stephen Ministers are bringing Holy Communion to our shut-ins. We are doing what Matthew 25 calls for: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick.

We as members, as believers in Christ are doing all these things and more. 1 Peter 9, 10 says, “**you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession,... you are the people of God...**”

And why? “**That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**” You are lights in this world. You through your service, your words and deeds of love are witnesses to God’s love.



Now the concept of “member”, in fact the word “member” comes from the scripture you see on the cover of our bulletin: 1 Corinthians 12:27. Today I am mixing metaphors to talk about being “Membered” being a member of the Body of Christ, the Church and local churches like Vista. In the verses read today we as members of Christ’s Body are also referred to as “**Living Stones**” who are being built into a “spiritual house.”



The illustration on the screen captures that concept and the mixing of metaphors.

Membership comes with privileges but even more importantly responsibilities. Some of the privileges are these: we can “**enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,**” which is the very presence of God.

We have a great Priest, Jesus the Christ, who intercedes for us before God the Father. Again we are “**a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession,... the people of God...**”

And these are not so much privileges as tools and power given by God through the Holy Spirit to be lights to the world of his love.

Membership has spiritual, personal and communal aspects, which I will address now.

First, spiritual.

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a SPIRITUAL house to be a holy priesthood, offering SPIRITUAL sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Again we recognize the spiritual dimension of membership in that the Church and any local church are brought into existence by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the very Spirit of God that has called you and empowered you to respond and make a commitment to be part the Spiritual House which is the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church embodies the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit just as the physical body of Jesus embodied the Spirit of God. As Ephesians says, “In Him the fullness of God was caused to dwell.” And we, as we are committed to, as we are members of the Body contain that same Spirit.

I liked what one commentator said about us. He said, ‘**You are a brick**’. We are stones in the walls of the House of God. By ourselves we can’t do much but stack us up and we become walls and protection from the elements.



“There is a famous story from Sparta. A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and couldn’t see any walls. He said to the Spartan king: ‘Where are these walls about which you brag so much?’ The Spartan king pointed at his bodyguard of magnificent troops and said, ‘These are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick.’” Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter p. 226

Our spiritual sacrifices are doing all that we do for God. Whatever we do is spiritual if we are doing it as if we are doing it for the Lord. No matter how menial or boring the task if we remember God in it then it can become spiritual worship. We spoke about this during the summer in terms of practicing the presence of God.

Second, personal.

The entire book of Hebrews was written as an encouragement to Christians to not slip away from the faith or participation in the fellowship of the Church the Body of Christ. Many scholars who have studied Hebrews think that it was a sermon written to second generation believers who were drifting away or leaving the church because of persecution or disillusionment that Jesus hadn't returned.

This is why the section of Hebrews that was read today ends with, "And let us consider how we may 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—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Now disillusionment is a problem in the Church then and today. Not so much anymore that Jesus hasn't returned for we have adjusted to the idea it's going to be awhile, but we often get disillusioned with what goes on in the Church and with each other, which makes it easier to hit the snooze button on Sunday. I think this is summed up in the following comic.



The reality of church life, the Body doesn't fit the ideal. The problem is after reading the Bible and listening to uniformed people we think the Body of Christ should be as beautiful as that of a fashion model.



We never think about how much airbrushing, make-up and expensive clothing is used to cover up all the imperfections of fashion models. This is supermodel Heide Klum before and after makeup.

We don't have the same luxury in the church nor do I believe we want it. Jesus accepts us just as we are I believe we are called to do the same.

Jesus asked that we love one another as he has loved us and that people will know that we are his disciples by our love for one another. Part of love, in fact a great part of love is forgiveness. We are sinners and we sin. The church is a 12 Step program for sinners, in fact more steps than just 12. Don't be surprised when anyone sins, when you see them without their makeup; rejoice instead that God has made you a part of his royal priesthood to offer forgiveness to others. That's what priests do!!

We are here in the church to help others and be helped in return. WE are to **“spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”** We are to encourage one another and we can only do that when we are together, face to face; shoulder to shoulder in the work of God.

Personally, our church membership shows to the world whose side we are on. I told you the story of John who was 104 when I met him. He was almost blind and deaf but every Sunday he sat in the front row right in front of the pulpit. One day someone asked him why he attended church because he couldn't hardly hear or see anything. His simple reply was “to show whose side I am on.”

When you become a member of a church and practice your membership vows you show whose side you are on and that is becoming more and more important in our world when so many are trying to discredit and destroy our faith and practice; and belief in the Bible.

It is subtle and corrosive to the point they have convinced many Christians that the practice of faith is strictly personal and private and not to show our faith in public. It was much worse when these verses were written, and their message of not falling away and deepening commitment speak to us today.

Atheists and secularist crow every time it is announced there is a drop in church attendance or membership. We need to make sure no one crows about a decline in the church because of us. 1 Peter 2:12 reminds us this has been a long fought battle from the beginning, but it can be won simply by holding on,... participating,... personally committing and doing what the Bible asks us to do.

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

Vista certainly tries to live this verse out and you as you participate here are part of the witness and bring glory to God! Well done good and faithful servants.

You might wonder if your commitment, you being “membered” to a church matters that much. You are just one person. But think through the years what a single person has accomplished at times. I just finished watching a portion of Ken Burns, “The Civil War”. I was reminded of how the tenaciousness of one homely man saved the Union and ended slavery in the US.



I was also reminded of how one assassin ended that life and injected 100+ years of misery in race relations in America rather than healing.



One man stood in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square the day after the June 4th 1989 massacre and became a symbol of non-violent protest in defense of life and democracy.

Often all it takes is one positive example to begin the waters of justice, healing, love or growth flowing. Question is, “Will you be the one?” We are God’s own people chosen by God. Will you choose to be the chosen one and commit to being membered to Christ’s Body here on earth?

Finally, communal.

You certainly saw today the good the Church has done through the ages, more good than bad, though, evil has hijacked the church at times. But despite it all Christ loves the church and in the book of Revelation refers to the Church as his bride.

John Wesley said, **“None of us go to heaven by ourselves.”** None of the Christian denominations are the “one true church” that you have to belong to in order to go to heaven. But you need to be a part of the Church with a capital “C” in order to go to heaven. We go to heaven as loved ones and families with the love of God who is God drawing us there.

And if any of us go to heaven it will be because we have cared enough to help another find their way there. Personal salvation has been so personalized it has cut many off from the Body of Christ. So many have become such individualized stones/bricks lying around that they refuse to be built into anything. And at times when most needed they are not there.



Church membership and participation is a sign or symbol to the world of what's to come like Holy Communion is a sign of the coming Heavenly banquet, like a wedding ring is a sign of commitment, like the Church on earth at its best is a sign and symbol of New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God. Again, Jesus said to "Love one another". We can't do this in the abstract or theoretical.

The membership rolls of a church are also symbolic of having our names written and read from the Book of Life at the Last Judgment.



We make a greater witness together than we do separately. In a moment we will take a mighty offering to help with refugees/migrants in crisis in Europe. We will do much better together than any one of us could do on our own.

Indeed, "And let us consider how we may 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—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

I invite you who are not members here to consider making a commitment and if not here then at another church. Let the world see your commitment, your love and good deeds and because of that glorify God in Heaven. Amen.