

Theme: Important Things to Remember - “Keep Meeting Together!”

Believe it or not, I only have three Sundays left with you here at St. Stephen before we move to Wisconsin. And since my father is preaching the sermon next Sunday, I only have two more two more sermons to preach here before we move. As we see the moving day getting closer we’ve been making a list of many of the things we need to remember to do before we leave—important things that really need to get taken care of before our last day here arrives. There are also some very important things left to say while I’m still here—important things that I want to tell you and all the people who have meant so much to me during my 7 ½ years here. So I am writing those down also! In my last two Sunday sermons we will be looking at some familiar and important promises and truths from God’s Word. We’ll call this two-part farewell sermon series **“Important things to Remember.”** The first reminder is to **“Keep Meeting Together!”** This important reminder and encouragement is found in our text from...

Hebrews 10:23-25 (EHV)

²³ Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works. ²⁵ Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

I want to talk to you all today about an important “medical condition.” It’s one that affects millions of people. It may affect you, or perhaps it has affected you at some point in your life. It is a condition called “FOMO.” If you don’t know what “FOMO” is, then the good news is that probably means you’re too old to get it! ☺ “FOMO” is an acronym for “Fear of Missing Out.” According to the internet it is a term that was coined in 2004 referring to having “anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere,” often caused by posts on social media (Oxford Dictionary online). I jokingly said that this was a medical condition, but when I looked it up, I actually found an article written last year from the Cleveland Clinic on this very topic of how FOMO affects your health: “The fear of missing out can have a direct impact on your physical, mental and emotional health. You might physically experience some symptoms associated with anxiety.”¹

Ok, that sounds bad. We don’t want that kind of FOMO when it comes to things or events we see on social media. But how about FOMO when it comes to worship? Do you have a “fear of missing out” if you do not gather for worship with your fellow Christians on Sunday? Or do you feel like you’re really not “missing out” on anything?

Even if you read the printed sermon, or watch the worship service from the internet at home you are, in fact, “missing out” on something if you are not here for the worship service. You are missing out on one blessing that cannot be fabricated, simulated, or imitated: Fellowship! In order to enjoy and “share” (which is what the word “fellowship” means) in the blessings of church fellowship you must be around fellow believers.

Our text gives us a number of good reasons to **“Keep Meeting Together.”** And you’ll notice, it doesn’t say anything about who the pastor is, or even if there is a pastor there at all. God’s encouragement to His people is simply **“Keep Meeting Together.”**

The first reason He gives us this encouragement very much revolves around this blessing of “fellowship.” Look at **v. 24** of our text: **“Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works.”** One of the great blessings our fellowship with each other brings is love and an encouragement to grow in love!

¹ <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/understanding-fomo>

One commentator wrote something that I thought was profound about this verse of our text. He wrote, “We can believe and hope as individuals, but the practice of love always involves others. It also involves ‘good deeds.’ When love is present, it is exercised in good deeds toward others” (Lauersdorf, Richard E., *The People’s Bible: Hebrews*, p. 120).

Jesus Himself tells us that our love for each other is the sign that we are truly His followers: **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)**. You can’t show your love for each other or **“spur each other on to love and good works” (v. 24)** without meeting together! We all need that type of encouragement at times.

That brings us to the second reason God so strongly encourages us to **“Keep Meeting Together!”** Verse 25 of our text says, **“Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** Do you ever watch nature documentaries on TV? When a lion stalks a herd of gazelles, do you ever notice the one he goes after? The one who strays from the herd.

The Bible tells us that there is a “lion” roaming about looking to devour us—to devour our souls: the devil (cf. **1 Peter 5:8**). There is “safety in numbers” and there is strength in numbers. The book of Proverbs says, **“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)**. God wants us to **“Keep Meeting Together!”** for mutual encouragement. Giving and receiving strength when tempted, urging and being urged when wavering, comforting and being comforted when sorrowing are all blessings we receive when we **“Keep Meeting Together”** around the Word of God. And as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, we should do this **“all the more as you see the Day [Judgment Day; the Last Day] approaching” (v. 25)**. If the Hebrew Christians of that day needed this strong encouragement all the more as they saw the Last Day coming, what about us who are almost 2000 years closer to that Day?

Did you notice also that none of the reasons given in these verses are selfish, self-centered at all? That’s kind of strange isn’t it, since we derive benefits and blessings from gathering together with fellow Christians? But the encouragements in these verses do not emphasize the fact that you’ll want to go to church because it’s good for you, but rather they emphasize the fact that you’ll want to go to church because it’s good for others, for the whole body in general. Look again at our text: **“Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works ...let us encourage each other” (v. 24-25)**. In other words, if you don’t feel like going to church for your own benefit, or if for some reason you feel that you’re not “missing out on anything,” then go for the benefit of others! I can speak for myself when I say that it is an encouragement to me as a pastor and a fellow church member just having you *show up!* That’s encouraging, isn’t it?! Full pews are always more encouraging than empty pews. You can’t encourage your fellow members, or your pastor, if you’re an “empty pew!”

Finally, the third reason our text gives as to why God wants us to **“Keep Meeting Together”** revolves around the reason we gather together as believers in the first place: God and His Word. We gather together here in God’s house to meet with Him, to worship and praise Him for all that He is and all that He has done, and to learn from Him and His Word and draw our spiritual strength and eternal life itself from that Word. The first verse of our text gives us this encouragement and points us to the promises of God and His Word: **“Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful” (v. 23)**. The same God who sent His only Son to pay the ultimate price for your sins; the God who saved you and has a place waiting *for you* in heaven wants to meet with you in His Word. He wants to remind you of His promises every day and He wants you to share these blessings, to remind each other of these promises, and encourage each other with the blessing He has given you in giving you each other! And He promises to bless you with His very presence when you gather together in His name. And just so we’re clear, especially for those who are unable to attend worship services, or are unable to attend them in person as often as they’d like, remember what Jesus said, **“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20)**.

On top of all this consider the example Jesus set for us Himself. While Jesus was here on this earth He went regularly to worship with His fellow believers—to encourage and be encouraged (**cf. Luke 4:16**). If the Son of God Himself felt the need to attend worship services and gather around the Word with His fellow believers, shouldn't we?

This encouragement, I believe, is an especially important one as you as a congregation are facing a time of transition to a combined congregation and a change in pastors. We are calling for our next pastor today in our voters' meeting after the worship service, but the fact is, you could very well be facing some time without a full-time pastor in your midst. Praise God that Mark Gullerud will be filling in as vacancy pastor during this time, and we thank him for his willingness to serve. But during this time you are without a full-time pastor think of how meeting together will be even MORE important for mutual encouragement and strength.

One other thing I'd like you to think about: As I look ahead to serving a different congregation in a different location one of the things I'm looking forward to is the opportunity for a "fresh start." The opportunity to throw off some of the bad habits I may have fallen into over the years—both personally, and in my ministry—and put into practice some of the things I've intended to do, but never have.

Have you taken some time to think about the fact that you all have this same opportunity as well? During the upcoming vacancy and future pastoral change it might just be time for a "fresh start" for you as well. Do some soul searching. Are there some "bad habits" you'd like to change? Are there some things you'd like to start doing that you've been putting off for a long time? How about your participation in this congregation and the work of the Lord? Ask yourself: Am I attending as often as I could? Am I doing all I can to encourage my fellow believers and my future pastor? Have I participated as much as I could? If not, remember the words of our text. This is God's encouragement to you to **"Keep Meeting Together"** around His Word to encourage each other and to spur each other on toward love and good works.

I don't want any of you to have FOMO—not the social media kind, or when it comes to gathering together for worship and that priceless blessing of fellowship! God doesn't want you to "miss out" either: **"Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ Let us also consider carefully how to spur each other on to love and good works. ²⁵ Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."** Amen.