

“Can’t Miss a Sunday: Anticipation and Surprises”

Hebrews 10:23-25 New Living Translation

January 7, 2018

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Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

This morning we sang---

////(8:05/9:30 Open Up the Heavens--- by Meridith Andrews)

We've waited for this day  
We're gathered in your name  
Calling out to you  
Your glory like a fire  
Awakening desire  
Will burn our hearts with truth  
You're the reason we're here  
You're the reason we're singing  
Open up the heavens  
We want to see you

Open up the floodgates  
Show us your glory  
Show us your power

We want to see you/////

(11:05=Open Up Our Eyes----Elevation Worship)

Greater is the one who's in us  
Greater is the one who calls our name  
He will never fail  
Stronger is the one within us  
Stronger is the one who fights for us  
He will never fail

Open up our eyes, surround us with Your light

Mighty is the one who's for us  
Mighty is the one who's strong to save

Your love endures forever  
Our God is fighting for us always  
Our God is fighting for us all

We are not alone, we are not alone////

Today we begin a series “Can’t Miss a Sunday.” And yet church attendance across denominations and across the nation continues to drop.

I want to build an anticipation that you can't wait until Sunday because every Sunday there is going to be a surprise. A surprise as to what God might do in your life.

The following has been floating around Facebook so you may have heard a variation of it, but I think it is appropriate here.

“A lady went to her Pastor and said ‘Pastor, I won’t be going to your church anymore.’

The Pastor responded ‘But why?’

The lady said ‘Ah! I saw a woman gossiping about another member; a man that is a hypocrite; an active church member living wrong; people looking at their phone during service; someone actually sleeping, some are staring at me----among so many other things wrong in your church.’

The Pastor went silent for awhile and then replied ‘OK. But before you go, do me a favor: take a full glass of water and walk around the church three times without spilling a drop on the ground. Afterwards, leave the church if you desire.’

The lady thought: too easy! She walked three times around the church as the Pastor had asked. When she finished she told the Pastor she was ready to leave.

The Pastor said, ‘Before you leave I want to ask 3 questions. When you were walking around the church, did you see anyone gossiping?’

The lady replied ‘No.’

‘Did you see any hypocrites?’

The lady said ‘No.’

‘Anyone looking at their phone?’

‘No.’

‘You know why?’

‘No.’

‘You were focused on the glass to make sure you didn’t stumble and spill any water. It’s the same with our life. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, we don’t have time to see the mistakes of others. When you come to church you should be that focused on God. Jesus said, “Follow Me;” He didn’t say follow Christians.’” Don’t let your relationship with God be determined by how others relate with God. Let it be determined by how focused you are with God. Concentrate on your own walk with the Lord.”

And there are many reasons people give for not going to church. Here are just a few of reasons people give and my counterpoint. 1. The church service lasts too long. (Hmm, is it longer than a football, baseball, basketball or hockey game?) 2. Fear of being judged. (Shame on us---unless you are perfect---judge not unless you want to be judged.) 3. Church is boring. (You know, I don't want to go to a boring church either.) 4. I've been hurt by the church. (Unfortunately, many people have. Some have been hurt by other members, and yes some hurt or disappointed by clergy. Believe in God, trust in God. The church and pastor will let you down. Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony is known as a classic. If you were to go to a concert and hear this classic, but the concert was done by a middle school band....would you leave the concert saying "Wow that Beethoven sure didn't know how to write music." Or would you leave saying, "That group didn't play well." Friends too many so called Christians doing unchristian things undermines and has a negative effect on church attendance. God is still God. 5. It's organized religion. (Yes, church is organized religion---as opposed to disorganized religion?)

Years ago the only place to go, the only place open on Sunday morning was church. Not so anymore. Today there are so many choices. We are a highly mobile society so we travel and are on the go more. We work long and hard and well Sunday may be your only time to rest and have down time and be with family.

You know, some of these reasons, or excuses sound pretty reasonable. Some say that the church isn't connecting with their life. Beloved if a worship service does not in some way...music, liturgy, prayer, message, what is said and done...if worship does not connect in some way with your daily practical life I see that as a failure on my part. Church/worship needs to be practical to deal with issues of life.

I love the logo image slide that was put together by our Tech Director Chris Steurnagel. White water river rafting. Anybody ever gone white water river rafting? The excitement, the adventure, the surprises. Hold on to your hat. I love the people's facial reactions. They are in the raft and are ready for the ride.

Oh that we may have expectations on Sunday. What are your expectations at church? To put your time in and then go home. Expect to slip in and slip out and not talk to anybody. Come in expecting the service to not be very good. Expect the music to be too loud. Expect that we are not going to sing your favorite song. Expect that it is going to be cold in the sanctuary. Expect that it is going to be hot in the sanctuary. Or do you expect to go to church and leave being charged, changed, and challenged.

**<sup>23</sup> Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.**

Can't miss a Sunday because we need to hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm. Now there are 2 ways of holding tightly. If I moving furniture or something I have a hold tightly so I won't drop it. I hold it so tightly that my hand actually hurts. I can't wait to put whatever I am carrying down.

There is another type of holding tightly. This Thanksgiving I flew to South Carolina to be with my son, daughter in law and their 3 children. The plane landed around 8 p.m. or so. My son was to pick me up. As I came out of the terminal...to my surprise was my 3 year old granddaughter. Since it was past her bedtime I just assumed she was in bed. She came running, yelling, "POPS!" and then she hugged my neck and I picked her up and I held on tightly. Oh I held something precious and didn't want to let her down. But do you see the difference...this time I held tightly but my hand wasn't hurting, instead of can't waiting to put down the furniture, I didn't want to put down by only granddaughter.

Let's hold on to the hope of Jesus tightly. We are to be people of hope. We affirm that. And we believe that God can be trusted. He who gives us promises is faithful.

**<sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.**

Can't miss a Sunday because we need each other to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. I like some other translations that say... "stir up one another" to love and good works. I love sweet tea. Thankful many restaurants have sweet tea already made. But on occasion I have to get tea and add sugar to it. I like SWEET tea. So for me it is more than just one packet. Of course when I pour the packet in guess what I have to do...stir it up. So I get my tea just right. By mid meal I have emptied the glass half way and my well meaning and attentive waitress comes by sees my half empty glass and fills my glass full of unsweet tea. I say "thank you." So kind and attentive she is. But then I have to get some more sugar packets and open and pour them in and then guess what I have to do... "stir it up." Friends we need to be stirred up. Stirred up for acts of love and good works. Can't miss a Sunday---you need to get stirred up each week. Let's get stirred up! Let's get stirred up!!!!

**<sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.**

Let's not neglect meeting together. Can't miss a Sunday because we need to encourage one another. Somebody said, "You don't have to go to church to go to heaven." The other person responded, "Well, you don't have to wear a parachute to jump out of an airplane either, but it certainly helps."

The Can't Miss a Sunday series is not intended to be a guilt inducer, but rather a realization that something is happening here on Sunday mornings.

Anticipation:

I have anticipation each Sunday that God is going to show up.

I have anticipation that God is going to show me something.

I have anticipation that the music, liturgy, or something is going to speak to me.

I have the anticipation that I am going to be with people like me---in need of hope, in need of a Savior, lonely, but not alone, forgiven and living by grace.

I have anticipation each Sunday that my life will be better because I was at church and God met with me.

Anticipation and Surprises. Can't Miss a Sunday because at that Palm Harbor United Methodist Church I never know what is going to happen.

For example you went to church and nothing seemed to happen... but you miss a Sunday and you hear that 7 people got saved, the whole congregation got filled with the Holy Spirit and guest musicians that day were the Gaither Praise Band AND Hillsong United. What????? Surprised.

You never know what can happen on a given Sunday. There have been times when someone will say to me or Rev. Cathy or one of the ministry team... that was wonderful when that happened...we sometimes nod...or sometimes we admit that we hadn't planned that to happen... it just happened because we turn each and every service over to God. When God works we try to get out of the way.

Can't Miss a Sunday.....or do you have some reasons why you feel you can't go to church.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjaCh9gSaXc> (Reasons People Don't Go to Church)