






## THEREFORE...LET US!

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Biblical phrase “*let us...*” occurs, or is implied 5 times in this year’s Lenten sermon series, exhortations from the Word of God that begin: “**LET US...!**” It’s not “*would you*” or “*could you,*” and there’s no “*pretty please!*” It’s not “*singular*” but “*plural*” – a powerful Biblical imperative calling the body of Christ, the people of God, into community, connection and commitment. The phrase can be comforting and inviting; it’s also specific and challenging, evidenced in these verses:

-  **Let us** *draw near to God*; addressed by Pastor Puls last week;
-  **Let us** *hold fast the confession of our hope*; the theme of this Wednesday’s sermon. And today,
-  **Let us** *consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*;
-  **[Let us]** *not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some*; but
-  **[Let us]** *encourage one another, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:22-25)*

Now, I recall a Seminary professor telling my homiletics or preaching class, “*Be careful about feeding your people too much “let us...!”*” My first thought was “*lettuce*”, spelled “*l-e-t-t-u-c-e!*” You know that green stuff we eat in our salads, or that yukky purple stuff that some fancy restaurants add that I can’t stand! But the professor was trying to teach future preachers not to be too law oriented in our sermons, trying to change people with too much “*let us*” before first sharing the good news of what Christ has done “*for us!*”

And that’s what makes this year’s Lenten theme from Hebrews so meaningful, because it begins with a focus on Christ’s sacrifice - the Son of God giving His life once and for all on Calvary’s Cross, “*forgiving*

*our sins and lawless acts, remembering them no more!”* (Hebrews 10:17) Our walk with God is always a response to His love and grace, so “**THEREFORE**, [therefore] brothers and sisters, since we have confidence...and since we have such a great high priest,” then **LET US** follow “*the new and living way he has opened for us!*” (Hebrews 10:19-21)

My assigned focus today is Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

At first, that exhortation sounds benign, simple, like motherhood and apple pie: “*Let’s stir one another up to love and good works...let’s encourage one another to worship.*” Now who’s against that, right? At times, we all show love to each other and we all do occasional good works, thinking of others first, being kind, showing compassion and concern when folks are struggling, speaking encouraging words when someone is down, being helpful around the house or serving in caring ministries here at church. Many of us are faithful in worship, recognizing our need to honor God and praise the name of Jesus, seeking to grow in understanding of His word, and eagerly desiring to feast at His table of love! There’s nothing radical here, it seems, until we begin to unpack the deeper meaning of “*stir up.*”

That’s not a complacent or passive phrase, is it? It’s defined also as “*to disturb, to rouse, to foment, to provoke, to stimulate, to goad, to spur, to agitate, to warn, to instigate, and to prompt!*” In the letter to the Hebrews, the words were addressed primarily to Jewish converts who were having trouble persevering in the faith, tempted in challenging times to go back to the old ways of the Law, abandoning the liberating freedom of faith and trust in Christ. It was hard from them to stay focused on the “*new and living way,*” and thus the Biblical imperative: “**Let us** consider how to **stir up** one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

I don’t know about you, my friends, but my faith, my trust, my love, my good deeds, my confidence, my commitment to follow the will

and way of God always needs a little “*stirring up!*” I am tempted every day to go back to the old ways, to look out for self-first, to buckle under to sin and temptation, to whine, grumble and complain in times of setback and stress, to grow weary and lose heart because I’m focused way too much on the stuff of this world! And now that I’m “retired” [*whatever that means*] I don’t even “have” to be here every week, so I can relate to the desire sometimes to just sleep in and forget about coming to church some weekends! After all, I paid my dues for over 40 years, right? Enough church!

Wrong! You see, I still need, you need - we all need someone in our lives, and in our family of faith, the church, who will “*encourage, stimulate, and spur us on,*” because, let me tell you, the last thing Satan wants in these days is for us follow “*the new and living way of Christ!*” It’s so important, as John writes in today’s Epistle, that “*we love one another.*” (2 John 5) It’s so important, as the prophet Zephaniah declares, that we “*call upon the name of the Lord [together] and serve him with one accord.*” (Zechariah 3:9) It’s so important, as Jesus teaches in the Gospels that we “*bear much fruit,*” (Luke 13:6-9) for “*by this all people will know that we are His disciples, if we have love for one another.*” (John 13:35)

These are hard times when it comes to living out the Christian faith, **therefore** we need to take seriously the Biblical imperative: “**Let us!**” Who is it in your life or family, neighborhood or workplace or school that could benefit from a word of encouragement, perhaps a pat on the back or a word of thanks that gives consideration to how much you appreciate who they are and what they do. Who has been missing lately here at church, someone you could touch base with via text, twitter, tweet or maybe even an old fashioned telephone call or a nice card, simply saying, “*Hey there, thinking of you today, hope you’re doing all right.*” Who needs to reach out to you, “*stirring*” hope in your heart, for none of us are exempt, are we, from the “*tornados*” of life that can swoop down in an instant and wreak havoc on relationships and plans, sin and death a constant reminder of the fragility of life in a broken world?

Come on, people of God, there's supposed to be something radically different about our lives and our language, our attitudes and actions, the love of Jesus Christ changing us inside and out! So, **"THEREFORE,"** [*therefore*] because of what Christ has first done *for us*, it's time to digest the **"LET US"** of God's Word and *"consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near."*

*"All the more...!"* What a neat phrase because *"all the more"* is the outcome when God's people are *"stirred up"* to first *"consider"* one encouraging word, one kind and loving deed, one act of worship, one generous gift, one faithful prayer, one forgiving moment, one commitment to serve, leading to more and more and more! *"All the more"* begins with a decision today that our lives will be different when we leave this place. **"THEREFORE, brothers and sisters,"** in response to God's great love **for us** in Christ, **LET US** follow *"the new and living way he has opened **for us!**"* (Hebrews 10:19-21)

May God bless us in the journey. **Amen.**