

Bible passage – Hebrews 10:19-25

Intro

Slide<Gods love in action, Encouragement>

Last Sunday the mighty Forest Rangers football club had their presentation day down at Gannon's park.

My son William received his 9th participation trophy this year and it got me thinking about the point of giving trophies as an encouragement award.

Slide< funny pic of trophy factory>

All I couldn't help but think about the many happy trophy makers as they continue to supply 100's and 100's of encouragement trophies to clubs just like the Rangers each year.

Now in the first few years of being a member at the club I thought that it was great that the boys got an encouragement award for participation, but as the trophies started piling up I started to think that maybe these trophies had lost their intended purpose.

The well-intended purpose of encouraging the kids by giving them a trophy was being eaten away because it wasn't meaningful anymore, especially when 800 other kids were getting the same encouragement award at the same time.

And the boys weren't showing any signs of being encouraged because they got a trophy, they didn't go and practice more or try to learn new skills, they just put the trophy in the back of the wardrobe to collect dust.

Maybe the club could get a better return by encouraging the parents to bring their kids back for another season with a nice bottle of red!

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You see, I reckon our desire to get to the finishing line, full of hope and motivation has led to a misunderstanding of what real encouragement is.

Don't misunderstand my sentiment, I love as much as anyone a warm word of encouragement from a good friend and I love being able to share with someone a few helpful words in the hope they might be motivated to carry on.

But is that all encouragement is, just a few choice words to each other about getting to the finishing line in one piece?

Is there something more to encouragement that might help us as we do church and life together.

I'm thinking encouragement should be more than a box of forgotten trophies or just a few well-chosen words that make us feel temporarily better.

Real encouragement should be long lasting and it should have the power to change lives.

So, as we investigate what right encouragement is, let's look at this morning's Hebrews passage remembering the main theme of our current sermon series, Gods love in action.

By looking at encouragement with this theme in mind we might see Gods good purpose for encouragement in our lives.

Slide< what does right encouragement look like?>

Let's start by looking at the first few verses together.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Unlike the encouragement that a dusty trophy or a few well-chosen words brings, the encouragement we read about in the start of today's Hebrews passage isn't superficial or easy to put away in a box to gather dust.

To summarise, these first few verses are telling us that we can now have confidence to enter Heaven without the guilt of sin because Jesus Christ has become the one perfect and true sacrifice.

Unfortunately, the author doesn't use simple language, he uses symbolic language like Holy of Holies, he tells us about curtains and great high priests.

Now these things might not mean much to us in 2018, but to the Christians who this letter was written, they knew what all the symbolism meant, because they were once Jews who followed God's Old testament law very closely.

Slide<pic of Holy of Holies>

They understood the Holy of Holies to be the inner room of the temple where the ark which contained the ten commandments was.

They knew that this inner room of the temple was out of bounds to everyone but the High priest and that only he could enter once a year to offer a sacrifice to God for the sins of Israel.

A little bit before our passage today in Hebrews chapter 9 the author explains that even though God was pleased with the sacrifices offered by the high priest, they were not able to clear the conscience of the people.

God wanted his people to be reminded through the constant year after year sacrifices made in the temple that they were still sinful.

Gods own people would have to wait for Jesus who was the perfect high priest, a priest who could finally pay the full debt of sin owed to God.

Slide<pic of old toll booths south of Sydney>

If you are as old as I am and have been driving for a while you might remember the old toll booth that used to be on the princess highway at Waterfall.

A few mates and I would often go down the coast in our cars to go surfing, I can guarantee that every time we approached the toll on our way home there would be panic because we realised that no one had kept enough money for the toll because we had spent it all on hamburgers and meat pies.

Somehow though we would always manage to find enough 1, 2 and 5 cent coins from behind seats of the car to pay the toll but there was always this constant toll stress every time we went surfing.

Fortunately we live in a new age, tolls are automatically pre-paid and there is no need for the same anxiety that come from having to find the toll each time we travel.

In the same way, Jesus has paid the toll price for us for the rest of our life so we don't have to worry or feel guilty that we haven't done enough when it comes to our sin.

And because Jesus has done this, the author says that you can 'Draw near to God with complete confidence and assurance that your sins have been paid for that you've been washed clean ...and that you are forgiven''

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And this assurance and confidence in Jesus as our hope is what real encouragement is, it's eternal and deeply personal for each one of us and it's the real encouragement that we can share with each other.

So if the good news of Jesus is what real encouragement is, how then are we to encourage each other with it, let's have a look at our second point to see how.

Slide<How do you encourage each other>

Well our passage says in two main ways.

Firstly we are to spur each other on to love and good deeds.

Slide<pic of two spurs>

If you are a city slicker like me then you might not have seen or know what a spur is, a spur is worn on the heel of the horse rider and it has a couple of different purposes.

One purpose is to motivate a horse to move quickly even when it is worn out which sounds harsh but if you were on a battle field in ancient times and you needed a quick escape from danger, spurring your horse to move quickly could mean life or death.

One other use for the spur can be seen in modern equestrian riding, with a spur the rider can transmit subtle signals to the horse that are almost invisible to other competitors.

These two ways in which spurs can be used are important to take note of, balancing the harshness of a heavily dug in spur compared to the gentle nudge of a spur intended only to slightly change the direction means that we should think carefully about how we spur each other on.

You wouldn't spur a war horse in the heat of battle with only gentle nudge because defeat would surely come.

In the same way you wouldn't dig a sharp spur into an equestrian horse, drawing blood because the horse might run away and never be seen again.

The practical nature of spurring each other on means that we will sometimes get the measure of force that we use to spur each other on with wrong.

So its important that we put into practice the good listening and speaking skills that we have been learning about in the last few weeks of our sermon series into practice to help us use the right measure when spurring each other on.

Remembering to listen carefully in the midst of someone's addiction to sinful ways or to some ones deep hurts at losing a family member will be important in working out how to spur someone on.

listening well by showing humility and remembering we have 2 ears to listen and one mouth might also be helpful to remember.

Secondly once we have a good understanding of how we might spur one another because we have listened well and have got to know the person better, we need to be able to speak appropriately and with love into people's lives.

At the heart of our speech should be the hope that the Gospel brings, the hope and encouragement we were given in the start of today's passage that we can have complete confidence in Jesus as the one who has finally paid the debt that we couldn't possibly pay.

This good news has the power to free us from addictions, comfort us in our sorrow, guide us when we are lost, it brings reconciliation when we are separated, sustain us when we are feeling weak and brings hope to those who are sick or facing disaster.

The second way we can encourage each other with the gospel is in the command that we might not stop meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

Slide<pic of hot coals>

One of the joys of living in the bogans shire, I mean Sutherland Shire is that its mandatory to have a fire pit. And because I love burning things I've had been able to have lots of fire over this winter.

One of the things I've noticed about having regular fires is that the hottest time of the fire isn't in the beginning when the 2 litres of diesel I have poured over the fire ignites into a raging six feet inferno.

It's the coals towards the end of the night that are the hottest.

Even when there is no visible flame or extra wood added to the fire, the coals just keep burning bright and hot, but they only keep burning hot as long as they stay together.

Pull a single coal out of the fire away from the other coals and that one burning coal slowly loses its heat and the fire dies out.

The church that we meet in each week, the growth groups we attend mid-week even the friendships that bring us together socially are just like those many hot coals found in a fire pit, When we keep meeting together we will continue to warm and fuel each other.

When we stop meeting together we become like that coal that is taken out of the fire, we lose our heat and eventually we become cold, cold to Jesus and therefore cold to the hope that comes from the good news of the gospel.

Friends staying close to the source of the heat will require us to invest deeply into each other's lives with time and honesty.

We will need to be intentional in the way we open our homes to each other, intentional about deciding to hang out with someone outside church to read the bible and pray.

But meeting with each other means that you and I will continually be encouraged and warmed by the good news the gospel brings.

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Friends if I could paint you a picture of what a church that encourages each other by spurring each other on and continually meeting together with the gospel at the centre looks like.

It would be a church where the heat of the gospel was constantly on the rise, where each of us who are broken hearted and lost could come and be shown the true hope that the gospel brings.

How great would it be if the community that we are trying to reach could see God's love in action as we encourage each other by spurring and meeting with each other regularly with the hope of the gospel at the centre.

To finish the passage this morning our author has one last encouragement for us, it's the reason why we want to be a church that encourages each other and it's my last point which can be found in the last half of verse 25.

It says.

Slide<Why do we encourage each other

but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

One of the most common types of questions I get in my teaching high school students about Christianity is the 'How' type of question.

How did God create all that we see

How did God come about, was he created by something else

What I tell my students is that Gods word isn't a text book on How he did what he did but a hand written letter to us about why he did everything he has done.

The end of verse 25 is concerned with this exact thing.

WHY

Why are we to keep encouraging each other by spurring each on to love and good deeds?

Why are we to continue meeting together?

Because Jesus is planning his return to earth as judge over all of humanity and as saviour of all those who call him King.

Hebrews chapter 9 reminds us.

Slide<Hebrews 9 passage>

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Friends, the ultimate reason for encouraging each other with the gospel is so that we all might be standing firm in our faith on that last day when Jesus returns.

That as we patiently wait for that time to come, we all might continue to have complete confidence and assurance that Christ has paid the price for the sin, of those who call him Lord.

We encourage each other because not only do we want to run the race together, but because we all want to finish the race together.

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Our biggest challenge as we live in this broken down world is that we will feel like removing ourselves from the fire that keeps us hot.

Deep suffering has that effect on us, it deceives us into thinking that no one could possibly understand what we might be going through.

Those same hurts leave us feeling like hardship is only ours to bear.

Friends this is a lie from Satan, We have not been brought into a community of believers, brought into the body of the church to then just do life and hardship on our own.

God has given us the command to encourage each other by spurring one another on and meeting together regularly for a good reason.

He knows when we don't rely on him or keep placing our trust in him we can slowly start to doubt his promise of hope in Christ that he has given us.

Friends we might not need to be reminded, like the Israelites were, that we are still guilty of sin.

But we do need to be reminded daily of why and how we have been saved from our sin.

Gods intention in giving to each one of us a body of believers to stand beside is that we would be constantly reminding each other of this good news in the way we meet and spur one another on.

Friends we all have been given good reasons for meeting together regularly and spurring one another on to love and good deeds today, that reason is that God loved you through his incredible action of sending his son to die for you.

So Let's avoid the urge to send our encouragements via text message or to just wait until we see each other on Sunday.

Maybe consider how you might deeply encourage someone by taking the first steps in getting to them deeply by meeting with them to read the bible and pray with them.

And if you don't know how to ask them, who to ask or even how to start reading the bible with someone, please come and see me or Stu, we would love to help you.

Another way to encourage each other is to continue being an active and regular part of your growth group by allowing yourself to be more vulnerable than you might have been in the past.

Doing that with the intention of building stronger and more honest relationships with people will allow others to do the same within the growth group.

Today is hospitality Sunday, hopefully you will be spending time with people you don't know that well and you will have the opportunity to encourage each other by sharing not only your life but also how the gospel is your greatest encouragement in your life.

My prayer is that you would all take that opportunity to make today's passage an important part of your lives from now on.

Let's pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we are thankful for your good plan in our lives, not only do you send your only son so that we might be saved but you give each of us the body of believers that are able to encourage us of that great news.

Please help us today as we meet together for lunch, help us to share our lives and the hope we have in you as a great encouragement to each other.

Lord please transform us to be a people that know this real encouragement so that your church here in Peakhurst would be a beacon of light, in a dark world.

Amen.