

# Stir up one another

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 April 2019

Preacher: Ruairidh Maclean

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's turn back now to Hebrews chapter 10, which we read earlier. And let's turn to verses 24 and 25 to consider what we find there.

Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 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.

Now, maybe these verses may seem a little strange as the basis for a Thursday evening preparatory service.

Maybe they don't seem strange to you, but I hope that as we turn to these words and meditate upon them, I hope that as we do so, that we'll find in these words encouragement and help.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] And that they may even bring us to a place of repentance for any misplaced attitudes that we may harbor. Now, the foundational thought upon which these verses turn is the reality of the community of faith into which God has called his believing people.

That is, the family of God, the church. And in the midst of the individualism of our age, that is a radical teaching.

It teaches us that our true identity is found within this community. But not from within ourselves, which in essence would be another form of individualism.

But in Christ, who has called this community into existence, this family. So this community becomes of singular importance.

Because we follow Jesus, and we love Jesus. And this community is of exceptional importance to him.

[ 2 : 4 4 ] So much so that he died to pluck them from the clutches of death. And rose again to give them newness of life.

Not merely as individuals, but more than that, as part of his community upon the earth. As members of his body.

A remarkable thing to consider. And as we consider these two verses before us, I want us to consider three things that we see in relation to this community.

First of all, that we recognize, that we are to recognize that our responsibility within this community is a responsibility that we have one to another.

And to recognize that within this community, there are certain ways in which that responsibility must be fulfilled. And to recognize that within this community, we have been given the privilege of encouraging one another.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] First of all, then, let's consider this recognizing that we have a responsibility within this community one to another.

Because we read in the words of verse 24 at the beginning there, Let us consider how to stir up one another. It's taken as a given that we are part of this community, because that's the community that is being addressed.

And we are encouraged to recognize that we do indeed have a responsibility for each other. Now, the word that's translated here as to stir is an interesting word, because it suggests an action towards one another that won't necessarily be comfortable.

We are to stir one another up in love, but the stirring may not necessarily be a comfortable experience.

If a person is sleeping through a dangerous situation, the person who goes to try and rouse that person to get them out of that dangerous situation, they're not going to go in and just gently try and wake the person up.

[ 5 : 32 ] They're not going to go and whisper to them as though they're afraid of waking them up. They're going to go in and they're going to shake them. Wake up! Get up! You need to get out of here! You're in danger!

And that's not a comfortable experience, to be woken up like that. It can be disorientating. It can be quite scary. If you don't understand what's happening, in those moments before you grasp the situation, it can be an experience that's full of fear.

But what that person who wakes the person who's in danger up does is a loving thing. It is the most loving action that they could do in the circumstances.

It would not be a loving thing to allow that person to continue in sleep and their lives to be in grave danger. And we all need to be stirred like this from time to time.

We can become apathetic. Sleep overcomes us in a certain way, spiritually speaking. We become, in a sense, dead to the world around us, barely taking things in as we should, dead to the spiritual realities.

[ 7 : 04 ] Not fully dead, if you know what I mean, in terms of the person who is brought alive to the things of God.

That wouldn't be possible. But sometimes we can be deadened to these situations. And in the midst of a culture that is obsessed with so-called niceness, where no one wants to be challenged and no one wants to be shaken or stirred, we become almost afraid of being challenging, even in the church.

Yes, of course, it's possible to be obnoxious and rub people up the wrong way. But on the other end of the spectrum, things are just as bad. Because those who always say what people want to hear and never rock the boat, they are encouraging people along a path that is no good.

And, you know, you look at the world around us these days, and people are saying the craziest of things. And there are so many people in our society who say, yes, yes, that's great, that's wonderful.

But in reality, these people should be told that, no, what you're doing is crazy. What you're thinking is crazy. It doesn't have any basis in reality.

[ 8 : 31 ] You need to get a grip of the situation and realize the truth. That's the loving thing to do. But increasingly, it would seem that the majority of those who are in positions of influence, at least, seem to be saying the very opposite.

The only loving thing to do is not to tell anyone that anything that they're doing is wrong, or you'll make them feel uncomfortable. But we should know better amongst God's people.

And we need, at times, to make each other feel uncomfortable if we are to be loving towards one another, if we are to fulfill the responsibility that God has given to us to stir one another up, so that we seek what is right and good, so that we seek what is to God's glory, so that we don't become apathetic, so that we don't sleep our way through life.

And it's in the church, among God's people, it is not loving, it is not nice or caring, to let people go their merry way and follow a path that is to their spiritual detriment.

So we must recognize this responsibility. But we have a responsibility to fulfill it, seeking God's grace to be humble and loving in doing so, recognizing that we ourselves are just as much in danger as anyone else, that we are just as weak and frail and needy as anyone else, that we are no higher than anyone else, that we all find ourselves in the same situation, that we all need God's grace, and that we all are in this together.

[ 10 : 36 ] We all have this responsibility, one for another, to love one another and care for one another. And one of the areas in which this responsibility applies is how we deal with those who have believed but have never publicly made profession of that faith.

Yes, we should pray, and yes, we should be kind to them, but we should also stir them up so that they will come to that place where they acknowledge the reality of God's grace in their lives publicly.

And so that they themselves may, in that way, stir others up by that action. Our lives are not isolated one from the other.

God has set us in this community. If he has brought us to faith, he has placed us in this community. We are not islands. We are part of this family.

And what we do or don't do affects those around us. And this verse here brings us to consider that responsibility that we have one for another.

[ 12 : 00 ] So this stirring, this action on the part of God's people one to another, may be a kind of stiff form of encouragement.

It's not something gentle necessarily. It may be quite forceful at times. Something maybe even to the extent that it mirrors something of the kind of thing that we see in a picture that was painted years ago of a king who, before battle, was said to be comforting his troops.

What he was doing was that he was running up and down the line and prodding them with his sword. But he's encouraging them on. And he's comforting them in the sense that he's showing them, I'm with you.

I am here. And we are all in this together. And we are seeking to go forward. And you need to go forward or else the whole thing falls apart. Now, the Apostle Paul really takes a similar approach.

He is quite strong in the encouragement that he gives. He didn't allow the believers that were under his pastoral care who were just coming to faith to have quiet, private faith that they kept hidden.

[ 13 : 46 ] That simply wasn't the case. He makes it clear to them that they have been given this gift for a purpose.

They are to let their light shine, as the Lord himself taught us, that we are to not put our light under a bushel. We are not to hide it under a basket.

We are to let it shine. Maybe this is one of the reasons why, in the West, where there is so much discouragement from making our faith public, but the faith doesn't seem to be, in general, making much progress in terms of new people coming in.

Of course, there are those who are coming, but not in the great numbers that we would long to see. Because so many Christians keep their light hidden. And it's simply not a good thing.

So let's consider how we can stir each other up. Let's get excited about our faith, or allow ourselves to be excited about our faith, about the faith that he has granted to us.

[ 15 : 02 ] Let's be alive to that reality. Let us, by God's grace, be a blessing to one another. As part of this community of believers, there's this family of faith that the Lord has placed us in.

It is our God-given responsibility to one another. But I also want us to consider how we are to seek to recognize how we fulfill that responsibility one to another.

And we read, as we come towards the end of this verse, that we are to consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.

Now, I believe that the primary means by which we are to stir one another up is by word. That is, by God's word.

Not necessarily that we are always to be quoting it at each other word for word, although that might not be a bad thing. But by sharing the understanding that we have been granted of this precious word, and especially the ways in which we ourselves have been challenged by the word, and directed by the word, and shaped by this word.

[ 16 : 26 ] And the ways in which this word touches our lives are many. And we should give thanks for them, and we should share these things.

This is really what is the essence of fellowship, that we share how God has touched our lives through his word. And it's also important for us to take on board the context here, where we are told to consider one another.

I'm taking those two parts of the verse there. That is, we are to recognize the kind of people that we are. We are to recognize that we are all frail, faltering, failing creatures.

People affected by the fall, and all the weakness, physical, spiritual, and moral, that all that entails. We are to consider that reality.

It's not at all that we are to think ourselves above some whom we consider weaker, but to recognize that we are all needy, that we all need God's grace, and indeed, that we all need each other, because the Lord has set us together for that reason, because he has made us dependent upon one another in a certain way, as he has set us in his family.

[ 18 : 03 ] And so, what affects one member of the body affects the whole body. understanding and taking account of that is key to our dealing humbly and lovingly with one another, because we recognize that we are all in the same boat.

And it's an important step on the path of humility, which, of course, is traditionally one of the elements of focus for a Thursday of Communion, and partly why we're considering this this evening.

But we read here also that this is to love and good works, that we are to stir one another up to love and good works.

Now, of course, the word takes precedence, but our action must surely follow, unless, of course, we are to find ourselves speaking God's word in vain, or speaking the truth in unrighteousness by failing to respond to the truth that we speak ourselves.

And our actions which we hope and pray will reflect the truth that we speak are also part of this stirring one another up, provoking one another to love and to good works.

[ 19 : 30 ] Because as we see love and good works and action, we ourselves are stirred to respond with similar actions. Because we recognize the good in these things, that they reflect the truth.

But what exactly does the love spoken of here look like? And what do the good works spoken of here look like? Well, in relation to the love that is referred to here, and I ask the question, what exactly does this love look like?

I use the words look like there in relation to this, because this clearly refers to an action, to action, to things that are done.

Indeed, we might say of the love spoken of in the scriptures in general, that love is an action. It is never merely or even primarily emotion.

It is action. God's love is active. True love acts. And the love spoken of here is a love that mirrors God's love. The word used here is used primarily in the New Testament to refer to God's love, his redeeming action, his saving work in Jesus Christ, a love that is undeserved by those who receive it.

[ 21 : 05 ] And this ties in with the context here about recognizing our human condition, considering one another. And part of that recognition is that none of us deserves God's love.

And as the recipients of God's undeserved love, we are encouraged to show each other love of a similar nature, acting in love towards one another in spite of the fact that we don't deserve it.

And the good works that are spoken of here are the various expressions of this love and action. Love and good works here form a kind of unit emphasizing that loving action that is being encouraged here.

Now, these works are not to be confined to the sphere of our interaction with our fellow believers, but nonetheless that is the primary sphere in which such love is put into action, expressing that spiritual reality of our being born in Christ.

Now, it's worth mentioning some examples of the kind of good works in view here, trying to give practical and concrete examples from our own context, such as giving practical assistance to those who are in need, helping those who are less mobile with their shopping, providing assistance, monetary or otherwise, with those who are in need, helping those who are sick to attend the doctor's surgery, visiting those who are sick, visiting those who are lonely or depressed or housebound.

[ 23 : 00 ] And these are just a handful of examples. There are dozens more, I'm sure, that we can think of, but as we can see, they're all examples of showing love one to another, of good works that are characterized by this principle of love in action.

And we could mention one more example of loving action towards their brothers and sisters, and that is that the person who has come to a living faith and is spiritually speaking part of God's family, but haven't yet come to profess that publicly and associate themselves publicly with God's people in that way, that acknowledging that and making open and public profession of this reality in their lives, that that is itself a loving action.

it expresses the reality that this person recognizes that they have a responsibility to God, yes, but also to their brothers and sisters whom the Lord has set them in a family with.

May the Lord help us to stir one another to such love and good works. Lastly, let's look at recognizing the encouragement that we can be to one another.

Verse 25 says, 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.

[ 24 : 54 ] Now these words bring to our attention the importance of meeting together as God's people. Now in this context we should I suppose be careful that we don't see this merely as a law, as a legal obligation, although we might say that there's an obligation there, but it isn't primarily that, it's a reminder to us of what is for our good.

It's highlighting here what is good for the integrity of the family of God, good for the interdependence that is the reality of God's people, good for the people of God staying strong in the face of all that may come, but especially that we would be ready for the great day when Christ returns.

And this focus gives a desire, this focus that comes at the end of the verse focusing on the great day, this focus gives a desire both in the positive and in the negative.

And both of them are for our good, the desire to be prepared for his coming and the desire not to be found unprepared for his coming.

We are to prepare for that great day when we anticipate being brought into his presence, when we anticipate being brought to that great wedding feast.

[ 26 : 32 ] And one incredibly important aspect of our preparation for the great wedding feast is that family feast that the Lord has established for his people, for his family, that anticipates that great feast to come.

And I'm speaking of course about the Lord's Supper. We are to see this as part of our preparation for that great day.

And the Lord's Supper is an important aspect of our encouraging one another and especially to be prepared for the coming of our Lord.

In it, we remind one another of his death on our behalf. And in the context of it being celebrated on the Lord's day, we are reminded of his resurrection.

But we are also reminded in the words of the constitution of the supper, of his coming again.

[ 27 : 49 ] And that that is in itself to be a focus as we meet together. And that ties in with what we have here, encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Now this text, this verse, verse 25, emphasizes again the mutual encouragement that we are privileged to be able to give one another as we meet together.

But I have to say that I fear that all too often we come very far short on this point. Yes, maybe we find it easy to come to church.

But are we interacting with one another in a way that is meaningful sometimes? It's easy for us to come in and go out without sharing mutual encouragement, without entering into fellowship, without engaging with one another in that context for various reasons.

It seems to be a kind of general thing that in the churches in our nation that this has become a forgotten art to one degree or another.

[ 29 : 21 ] Of course, I'm not saying that it's a blanket thing, but this mutual encouragement where God's people meet and engage in fellowship is something that seems to be disappearing.

And that's a great concern. It's a grave concern. God's word sets out before us here that we have this responsibility to one another and this privilege to encourage one another.

what has happened to God's people speaking often with one another, sharing their challenges, sharing the answers they've received to their prayers, sharing the burdens they have in prayer.

What has happened to fellowship? Now, I make no comment about the situation here because I can't really comment because I haven't spent enough time amongst you to know much in that regard.

But as a general thing there seems to be an increasing issue. But the word of God brings us back to seeing the importance of this.

[ 30 : 42 ] Seeing how we have this privilege and this responsibility to encourage one another. But returning to how this ties in with the Lord's Supper, there is an aspect of that that I haven't really addressed and that's that our communal acknowledgement of Christ's grace and his mercy towards us, it mutually encourages each one.

And we might also see that when a person comes to acknowledge that for the first time, it is especially encouraging. And I say that as an encouragement for anyone who hasn't yet taken that step to recognize this.

On the negative side, it might be said that if such a person doesn't take that step, that they're depriving their brothers and sisters of the encouragement that they would have if they came.

And if they do come, then you are greatly encouraging your brothers and sisters as well as being encouraged yourself, encouraged in the faith, encouraged and strengthened as you go forward and seeking to live before God as his child, faithful to his word.

God. But of course, for any of this to take place, we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, trusting ourselves to him and submitting ourselves to the authority of his word.

[ 32 : 28 ] And if we truly submit ourselves to it, we will obey its every command. May God grant each one of us that humility that is, in a sense, the precursor of blessing as we submit to and obey the word of God.

Let's pray. God.