

**Rev. Mark Moline**  
**Sermon August 18, 2019 "Encouragement"**

Next Sunday will be the "Grand Celebration of Father Mark Leaving," --- so---, much of that sermon time will most likely be directed to farewells and my words of appreciation for your loving support.

I hope you don't consider me presumptuous, but today, I want to deviate from the regular Lectionary to leave you with sort of a synopsis of my pastoral counsel to you as a parish..

I want to leave you with this particular passage from the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the letter to the Hebrews: "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, <sup>NOT</sup> neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another."

This morning let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. How do you go about doing your individual part in stirring up love and good deeds here in this parish?

The author of this letter to the Hebrews, -whoever that author was- first mentions church attendance or, in his words, "not neglecting to meet together." Now I preached one sermon – a while back - about Church attendance in which I assured you, that as Episcopalians we are not slaves to church attendance. There are some very good reasons to miss a service on Sunday and/or Wednesday Mornings. Don't forget we do offer a regular Eucharist service on Wednesday mornings at 10:30 AM.

Still there are times we must miss. We have some who are very much a part of this family, who are physically unable to be here in person. Some must work on Sunday morning and then there are family needs and expectations; Then too it is sometimes important to just get away for a little personal solitude. According to the gospels, Christ himself frequently did just that.

During that previous sermon I urged you to be here, not because it was some sort of Christian Duty to do so, but because the rest of us needed your real presence here with us.

If you ask the typical unchurched person why they don't attend church, you would probably expect an answer that goes something like this: "I've tried it a couple of times and didn't get anything out of it, so why should I waste my time?" Their church priorities are out of order.

The first question ought to be, "What does God get out of my church attendance?" Followed by, "What do others get out of my being there with them?" And then, last but not least, comes the important question, "What do I get out of Church?"

Well, enough about Church Attendance. I don't think that is the primary theme of this brief passage. I believe this writing is primarily about that all-important phrase: encouraging one another! Be here to encourage one another. As I said the rest of us need you here.

This is a wonderful loving parish, never take it for granted. My parting pastoral guidance is: For as good as you are, work even harder at encouraging one another.

Be here for Katherine, your new Rector. Do all that you can to encourage her as your new Rector. It is never easy to come from the outside into an established church family. Love her, assist her, safeguard her personal time off. Listen to her, don't say anything about her that you wouldn't say to her face, and pray for her.

I could offer the same advice for the encouragement of your wardens and vestry. By and large, they have thankless jobs with no shortage of, well meaning, but outspoken critics. Thank them from time to time. Encourage them by offering only tactful constructive criticism, and remember no one can please everyone.

Of course, encourage one another. We have no idea of the burdens, the worries, the fears, the heartaches and the pain that is carried through that door on any given Sunday morning.

I think the most important tools we employ in encouraging others are our ears. On seven separate occasions in the four gospels alone, Jesus admonishes others by exclaiming "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

We encourage others by actively listening to them, and then asking follow-up questions based upon what they have told us.

I probably should identify prayer as being our first priority in encouraging others. But I don't see how we can know what to pray for unless we first listen.

We encourage one another by being there for them, by listening to them, by praying for and with them, and by worshipping with them.

I don't know how to explain it, but we especially encourage one another by kneeling and sipping or intincting from a common cup in the Holy Sacrament.

The word "Communion" means sharing unity and empathy, in a close relationship. We encourage others by sharing our lives with Christ and them in an up close and personal relationship.