

**Together we grow (Week 5 Frontline Sundays) St Nicolas 10.00am Sunday 24  
November 2019 Hebrews 10:19-25 and Luke 10:1-2, 17-20, 23-24**

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Although I didn't enjoy doing it, I once had to ask someone in another church to step back from their role in ministry at the front of the church. One of the three reasons I gave him was the way he spoke to people was, to put it mildly, very much at odds with how a Christian should behave.

He looked bemused. "But I always make sure I am nice to people on a Sunday before church," he remonstrated.

If that wasn't so tragic it would be comic. But really! The notion that as long as you're civil to people in church on a Sunday before the service begins, it doesn't matter what you then say to them the rest of the week, is so far wide of the mark that it barely merits comment.

Well if you have been here over the course of our five Frontline Sundays, I hope it will be abundantly clear that it really does matter how we behave towards others, not simply on a Sunday morning, but the rest of week too – the remainder of Sunday, for sure, but also Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Indeed, more than just matters, we – that is to say, laity and clergy alike - have the opportunity to make a real difference for God whilst on our frontlines, whether our frontlines be our workplace, amongst our families, with our friends, at clubs or societies, with our neighbours, the places where we do voluntary work.

I guess, then, if I had one prayer for this series of sermons it would be that it has encouraged us to see that we all have an important part to play in God's eternal purposes, wherever it is that we spend the majority of our week.

This morning we come to the last of our sermons in this series. Ah - it's always sad, isn't it, when a sermon series comes to an end? Our title for today's sermon is 'Together we grow'.

What, someone might ask, is the purpose of spending time on a Sunday ... and at other times ... coming together as church if, as those of us who have preached in this series of sermons have alleged, we all have an important ministry when we are not together in church? Would, in other words, our time not be better spent out there, not huddled here in church, when out there there is a world desperately in need of an encounter with the Christian gospel?

It's a fair question, isn't it, and one that demands an answer. What really is the point of our coming together when we can each do a power of good out there?

Well let me refer us again to part of what was our first Bible reading this morning - Hebrews 10:19-25. It's on p1208 of our church Bibles for those who would like to follow a little more closely what I am about to say.

Let's begin with vv24 and 25.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

In 2011 Hodder & Stoughton published a revised edition of the *New International Version* of the Bible. I for one was glad that they did because it provided the opportunity to improve some of the bits that weren't so good in the previous version, one of which was these two verses that I have just read to you.

Let me read to you the same two verses from that earlier version.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Do you see the difference? In the earlier version, the two verses are presented as two separate ideas. However, in the revised edition which is the version we have in our pews, the two verses are linked, making it abundantly clear that the way in which we spur one another on towards love and good deeds is by not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.

No connection to my preparation for today, but I received something via email relevant to this subject which I found helpful. The writer, someone called Joe Warton, sees our life as a Christian as being analogous to a boxer in a boxing match.

A boxer, during the round, might be on the receiving end of many punches. But every so often the bells goes and they return to the corner of the ring and slump on their stool. They swig water while the trainer sees to patching up their cuts and telling them all the while, “You can do this! Remember what we've worked on: keep your guard, keep moving.”

That, Joe Warton suggests, is exactly how the church can – and should – function. “When God's people gather,” he writes, “we share a love that is deep and practical, gracious and forgiving. We joyfully spend ourselves on others. We use our gifts, skills, and resources to build-up our brothers and sisters, recognising all that we have comes from God and is ultimately for his glory. We look back at the week just gone, hearing God's 'well done' for the good work we've done, his forgiveness for where we've strayed. We remember he was with us in the ring the whole time, and we thank him for that. Then we get set for the round ahead – how we want to approach it, who we're going to live for when the bell rings.”

As I was thinking about what to choose as a Gospel reading for our service today, I quickly alighted upon the one I read for you a few minutes ago. For in its own way, it seems to illustrate brilliantly this point I am trying to make.

Jesus sends out in pairs 72 disciples on mission. Well praise God for that. But actually, I chose it not so much for what it tells us about Jesus sending disciples out on mission –

important as that is – but for what it tells us about what happened when they returned. They talked with Jesus about what had happened, and Jesus taught them some more.

The point is, if we are doing worthwhile stuff for God on our frontlines, it will raise things that we will want to share with others as well as things with which we will want help. That's an important part of what the church is for.

So how do we here encourage and equip one another for mission on our frontlines?

We do it, I hope, as we worship: as we sing songs and psalms, as we pray, as we listen to testimonies and the sermon, as we receive bread and wine. Here each week we are given again a fresh opportunity to glimpse God and his love for us and to be reminded of the part he calls each of us to play in his eternal purposes.

We do it, I hope, one-to-one. Yes, it's fun to talk about football or *Strictly Come Dancing* or the coming election! But I hope, too, we might dare to ask one another about the week we've had as well as the week coming and, in particular, what the challenges and opportunities are for us as we seek to be good news on our frontline.

We do it, I hope, in housegroups. Here – I hope – are a trusted bunch of friends with whom we can be our honest ourselves. As we engage in conversation informed by our reading of Scripture, and pray for one another, here is a brilliant opportunity to be encouraged for ministry on our frontline.

And we do it, I hope, as we meet together on discipleship courses, courses such as *Alpha*, *Christianity Explored*, and *The Bible Course* – all of which we have run at different times at this church. We run these courses not simply in order to have a good time, although I hope we have a good time, but also to equip us to be more effective on our frontlines so that when difficult questions arise, we are more ready to give an answer for the hope we have to those around us.

Film: 1 minute 45 seconds

In short, then, church is very much about equipping us to be the people we need to be Monday to Saturday as we seek to make a difference for God on our frontline. And so, Lord, "Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory".

Well I began by saying that this is the final one of our five frontline Sundays. However we, the Ministry Team, don't want this to be the final word concerning the importance of making a difference for God on our frontlines. And so we are going to be considering other ways in which we can keep this theme somewhere near the top of our church agenda.

To this end, one of the things that the Ministry Team would like to do – between us – is spend a bit of time with as many of you who are on the Electoral Roll as possible, asking three questions in particular. These will be something like:

1. What activities are you engaged in apart from church?

2. How do you express your faith in these places?
3. What can the church do to support you in the expression of your faith in these places?

We're going to make a start in the New Year and see how we get on. So stand by your phones, email, front doors whatever ... hopefully not with a baseball bat but with a friendly welcome.

Prayer to end...

We thank you, Heavenly Father, for the gift of this community.

We commend one another to you on our different frontlines.

Wherever we are, whatever we do, whoever we are, may the Holy Spirit guide us in all things so that we may do God's will in the world, in the service of Jesus Christ and with great joy.

**Amen.**