

Hold onto the Faith We Profess in Christ: Part 2
Recognizing our Corporate Identity
Sunday, 6/18/17

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 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 (Hebrews 10:19-25).

Last Sunday, we considered the question: What do we profess? I wonder how many of us know what we believe and confess. **The invitation for us is to keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going (Hebrews 10:23 MSG).** We want to know what we profess and we want to get in active obedience to what the Lord says. It is not enough simply to believe; our beliefs call us to action.

There are promises from the Lord that keep us going. And, we have to accept the challenges associated with those promises that help us keep a firm grip on what we believe in the Lord. It is not enough simply to believe; our beliefs call us to action.

Challenges

1. Make time to draw near to God through spiritual practices on a regular basis. What are your regular spiritual practices?
2. Choose to confess and hold onto your hope in the Lord because he keeps his promises. What are you confessing and believing? What is the Lord asking you to live into?
3. Find ways to provoke one another on toward love and good deeds. In what ways are you provoking others to love well and to serve faithfully?
4. Prioritize meeting together to worship the Lord, to minister to and serve one another, and to get equipped and resourced. What are you prioritizing on your calendar?
5. Choose to encourage and build up one another. What are you saying and doing to promote others?

In Part 2 of our message today about *Holding onto the Faith We Profess in Christ*, we want to consider our corporate identity and the implications for us as a body of Christ.

Five times in these verses, the Scripture says, “Let us...”

Can you get present to our corporate identity assumed in this passage?

Recognizing Our Corporate Identity

1. We are created to be unique individuals who do life together in community.

I keep meditating and reflecting on the corporate identity of people in Scripture. People in the Bible got a huge part of their meaning from their family, clan, tribe, and nation. When they thought of themselves, they thought of themselves as “us” before thinking of themselves as “me.” That was true for the Hebrew people. It was true for the early converts who gathered in faith communities.

In most of the world, people get a significant part of their identity from their community. They are a part of families, clans, tribes, and people groups where the corporate identity is stronger than their individual identity.

That communal identity is not so strong in America. We cut our teeth on individualism. We value being self-reliant, independent, and self-sufficient. Obviously, those are strengths. And every strength taken to an extreme becomes a weakness. For example, we are prone to isolation and cut off.

And, we fail to see our interdependence. We fail to understand corporate and communal realities, that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. Here is reality: when something happens to one we are all affected because of the brotherhood and interconnectedness of humankind.

You see today an emergence of communal identities in our culture. In marketing they talk about tribes and niche marketing. There are sub-groups and tribes where people get their meaning and belonging. This is reality.

Those sub-groups or tribes have a certain ethos, particular codes of behavior, and similar expectations of each other. People have a strong desire to belong to something bigger than themselves. They long to be understood at their deepest levels. They want shared journey and experience. In those groups, however, you can see the togetherness force exert pressure on individuals to give up their values and guiding principles. People sometimes give up self; they do and say things to fit in and to belong that violate who they are and what they believe.

2. The principle of differentiation helps us understand how to live as a unique individual in the midst of community.

There is a principle that helps us understand how we were meant to live. It is called **differentiation**. It puts together the realities that we are all individuals created in the image of God and that we were created for community. The way that I flourish is to be and to express who God has made me to be, and to choose to stay connected with others in

deep, meaningful relationship. I don't want to fall into the extreme of individualism, and become a disconnected self. And, I don't want to give up self to fit into community. Rather, I bring all of who I am into community, and others bring all of who they are into community, and the sum of the parts becomes greater than the whole.

One part of emotional maturity is being well-differentiated. **A well-differentiated person is able to do two things at once:** he or she is able to define self by finding ways to say, "This is what I think, this is what I feel, this is what I want, this is what I choose to do," while at the same time allowing (and even inviting) others to say what they think and feel and want and choose to do. He or she is able to **do this without either backing down or bullying others;** instead, this person remains calm, connected to his/her deeply held values, and focused on being the person he/she wants to be, regardless of how others in the group are being.

An emotionally healthy person realizes that there are two forces at work: **the individual force and the togetherness force.** These forces exist as creative tensions. We don't become rigid isolationists who are separate selves divested of relationship with others. And, we don't give up self to fit in and belong. Rather, we recognize our realistic dependence on others. We choose to be our best selves and we choose to stay connected and belong, doing the hard work of learning to love others as I love myself.

A well-differentiated person is one who recognizes his/her realistic dependence on others, but stays calm and clear-headed enough in the face of conflict, criticism, and rejection to distinguish thinking from feeling. This person can remain rooted in a careful assessment of the facts without having his/her thinking clouded by emotionality. She can express what she believes. He can say what he wants, needs, and feels. This person has a guiding set of principles and has a substantive level of integrity. That is, she can make thoughtful decisions and then follow through to completion-- not because of pressure from the group but because she has the capacity to act selflessly. He defines himself **without being pushy and deals with pressure to yield without being wishy-washy.**

Don't you want to live like that?

Application: When we get a vision of our corporate identity, **we recognize that we need each other to help us keep going.** The Lord has given us as a gift to one another. Isolated individuals and independent agents lose steam and energy in the journey of life. They become targets of the enemy. We need each other; we weren't meant to journey alone.

Living from and into Our Story

As I have reflected on this passage, I keep thinking about our story together in the Lord and as part of the Joshua Generation.

We have a wonderful, unique identity and calling as the body of Christ at Calvary. We have a story— our story. It includes our past: where we have come from. It incorporates what we experienced along the way. And, it involves where we are going.

Many people who are a part of Calvary today don't know our history and our past. They miss our context. Yes. We talk about our journey and our history in Discovery Day. (See addendum.) And, we need to talk about our journey more often as a congregation in the days ahead.

Here is another part of our story. I am called to be a part of the Joshua Generation. I believe that we as a congregation are called to be a part of the Joshua Generation.

The people whom Moses led out of Egypt had a shared experience and history of deliverance from Egypt. But, that generation rejected the Lord's purpose for them to possess the promised land. So, they spent 40 years in the wilderness as one generation passed away and another generation got prepared (Numbers 14:20-25). Only Joshua, Caleb, and those who were under 20 years of age would stick around to enter into the promises of God in the Promised Land. These people, including those born in the wilderness, were part of the Joshua Generation.

A significant part of my identity comes from understanding that I am a part of the Joshua Generation, a generation who has been and is being prepared to possess the promises and prophetic words of the Lord. The people in the book of Joshua had a history of shared experiences in the wilderness. Many who were born along the way never personally experienced the victory of the Lord over the most powerful nation on earth through the ten plagues. They didn't participate in the release from captivity. They didn't experience the parting of the Red Sea or the Lord's victory over the armies of Pharaoh. They didn't live through the awesome encounters with God on Mt. Sinai.

What they did see was the daily miraculous provision and leading of the Lord day and night in the wilderness and desert. What they did experience was the Lord transforming their identity as a people of slavery into the people of God. What they encountered was breakthrough and blessing in the midst of testing and trials. What they did learn was how to do life together for the Lord. What they did become was an army forged together by the hand of the Lord.

On the journey of possessing the promises of God, the Joshua Generation did see the mighty works of God, the signs and wonders of the Lord, and the victories of God over his enemies. There were victories and breakthroughs all along the way. And, their biggest miracles and experiences as a community were before them as they saw the Lord part the Jordan River, as they saw God bring down the walls of Jericho, and as they saw the Lord lead and empower them step by step to possess their inheritance.

Calvary, we have had an incredible journey with the Lord over these 35 years. Along the way, we have seen signs, wonders, and miracles. We have had awesome encounters with the Living God. The Lord has transformed us from a hyper-evangelistic congregation with a church growth emphasis into what we are today.

And today, there is a new generation of followers of the Lord here at Calvary. Some of you have not seen or experienced what the old timers (the Joshuas and Celebs) have seen and experienced.

Each of us needs our own experiences with the Lord. And, our congregation as a whole needs to experience more of the Lord together.

Here is what I believe. As we follow the Lord, I believe that we are about to step into a new season of seeing and experiencing the signs and wonders of the Lord. I believe we will experience the breakthroughs of God. I believe that we will experience new levels of joy that comes from partnering with the Lord to take new territory for the King of Glory.

Question: Are you all in?

1. **I want to invite you to get all in.**
 - a. Raise your level of expectation.
 - b. Hold onto the faith we profess in Christ.
 - c. Recognize our corporate identity, that we are making a journey together.

2. Point: Holding onto the faith we profess in Christ, holding onto promises of the Lord who is faithful, and holding onto our corporate identity have kept me going all these years. That will help you keep going, too.

Addendum to Part 2, which was shared on 6/18/17

Calvary's Story

We believe that God has called us to three primary focuses. I encourage you to memorize these three phrases so you can explain our *vision statement* to others:

- To establish people in **INTIMACY** with God — **My Story** (awareness)
- To express true Christian **COMMUNITY** — **Our Story** (action)
- To extend the **KINGDOM** of God in the Earth — **The Story** (authenticity)

These stories are like three concentric circles with each circle representing a different phase of our vision.

My Story (1985-88) — Our journey began with the inner of the three circles. Each of us seeking to find meaning and purpose in life. That purpose is found in intimacy with God. Coming into a rich and reconciled relationship with the living God. Calling him Father. Steve's first book, *Relational Christianity*, expressed and summarized these years. The main task was **significance**. Finding our significance and meaning in intimacy with God.

The Story (1989-96) — Transition came in early 1989 as God began to reveal to us his Kingdom dream, the outer of three circles. **My Story** was now being connected to **The Story**. We embraced a Kingdom philosophy and mind-set. We began to long for the restoration of the church and the return of Christ. We gave ourselves to intercession for spiritual awakening, unity, purity, and power in the church. Steve's book, *The Last Great Revival*, expressed and summarized these years. The main task of those years was **transcendence**. Finding our place in the eternal story of God and his coming Kingdom.

Our Story (1997-present) — This is the phase we are in today, the middle of the three circles. Our focus is now on community and the main task is **interdependence**. God is urging us to learn how we fit together as the body of Christ, a redemptive community, experiencing, expressing, and sharing God's love with one another and the city around us. Look for a third book from Steve later this year!

When we speak of the *place of community*, we refer to:

Place in Broadest Terms: physical property, rooms for teaching, caring for babies, worship center, student center, kitchen, prayer garden, the storage building, prayer room, offices ... we inhabit this place, it is where we dwell.

Place in Deepest Terms: people, relationships, roles we fill, love we share, partnership in ministry and mission with God and each other, spiritual companionship we find for our journeys; the rhythms of live we share in weekly worship, intimate prayer, outreaches, Bible study, fellowships, parties ... all of this is about dwelling in our place, not merely occupying space.

As we consider this *vision statement*, we must remember that God is in all three parts. Each of these *stories* is needed to express the fullness of God. Each story on its own is incomplete and has holes that leads to poor health. We have learned that without the second story (community), we are missing an essential part of who God has called us to be. *Community beautifully connects intimacy and kingdom.*

The Story, God's Kingdom dream, must become incarnate (take on bodily form), not only in us as individuals, but together corporately in community. As isolated individuals, no matter how close we are to God, we can never contain and display his fullness. God himself is community. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The only way to come to know the full love of Christ is "*together with all the saints.*" In **John 17**, Jesus prays "... *that we might be ONE, as he and the Father are ONE ...*" Listen as God's Word calls us to community:

Ephesians 4:15 -- "*... we will follow the truth at all times -- speaking truly, dealing truly, and living truly -- and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the head of his body, the Church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*"

Romans 12:4-5 -- "*In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body.*"

God is in the individual, the community, and the kingdom: it takes all three to express the fullness of God. We must work to grow *Kingdom people* and a *Kingdom community* in order to incarnate the *Kingdom of God* visibly and locally. Difficulties arise from an incomplete picture.

1. Without finding our place in The Story, both My Story and Our Story lead to pathology:
 - a. My Story becomes the rugged individualist — "*What I think and feel is right ...*"
 - b. Our Story becomes gangs — "*Our group is right and should rule ...*" (whether street gangs, political parties, denominations, or churches)
2. Without including My Story and Our Story, The Story becomes talk without power to transform the individual or the community.
 - a. Incarnation is replaced with ideology. Words replace works.
3. The time is now to embody the *Kingdom* in *community*.
4. The dream must be turned to deeds in the local setting.

Luke 17:20-21 -- "*Upon being questioned by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered and said, 'The Kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is among [within] you.'*"

Calvary's membership is quite diverse: Some of us come from conservative and traditional backgrounds and are in transition with freedom in worship and ministry. Others come from ultra-charismatic extremes and are looking for balance ... openness to Holy Spirit and gifts without excess. Some of us have no background in church and have found our home here in the Lord as a part of the body of Christ at Calvary.

Church History: Calvary began as a mission of Houston's First Baptist Church and Union Baptist Association (Sept. 1982)

1982-84 Start of the Church Hyper evangelistic with *church growth emphasis* -- religious factory with lots of hard work

1982 Met in an elementary school and a movie theater ('82 - '87)

1984 Change in Senior Pastor -- Pastor Steve Meeks arrives from Arkansas

1985 Backdoor problem; burnout

1985-88 My Story -- Focus on INTIMACY with God (awareness)

1985 Influence of Wimber and the Vineyard movement (Power Ministry)
The Lord asks for his church back.

1986 Worship -- Learning to sing to God rather than about him
Small group ministry established

1987 Divine visitations and healings
Phase One of current building completed (120 people)
Silence at the end of services (up to 2 hours ... no one would move)

1988 Increase in Power Ministry / Intercession — cry for REVIVAL

People are coming from all over to receive prayer and healing

1989 Another visitation (7/30/1989) – Our Sunday morning service went from 8am through Bible Study time, through the second service, and beyond lunch to 2pm. The Holy Spirit was ministering to us in repentance and salvation. The youth had just returned from a mission trip where the Lord encountered them and several of them were saved. Now, the Lord was continuing that move in the whole church. The Lord was revealing to many that they believed the scriptures but did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. At least 17 people, including church members and a deacon, came to salvation that day.

1989-96 The Story -- Focus on the KINGDOM of God (action)

Steve's books, translocal ministry, Ministry Team Training, and Houston Spiritual Awakening Conferences

Great Commandment/Commission (Read **Matthew 22:37-39, 28:18-20**)

1989 First exposure to prophetic ministry (Metro Christian of KC)

1990 Missions: God said "*give yourselves, not [just] your money*"

1992 Evangelism and Equipping burning values, but not implemented

1994 New Year — Toronto influence (refreshing May - Nov)

Multiple services, overflow crowds, manifest presence of God

1995 Really New Year: God spoke to Pastor Steve (Feb) "*prepare to reap and conserve the harvest ...*"

Servant Evangelism (Oct) "*be more intentional in serving others*"

Dark night of the soul for Pastor Steve (1995 - 1997)

Kindness projects: flood our community with “practical” expressions of God’s love

1997 - present Our Story -- Focus on COMMUNITY (authenticity)

Emphasis on prophetic word: “*prepare to reap and conserve the harvest*”
(servant evangelism is pushing us toward reaping; community is pushing us toward the conserving)

New small group structures (gift-based and passion driven groups)

New discipleship emphasis (sermon-based groups)

New building and new vision (Intimacy, Community, Kingdom)

Desire to reach neighbors and create community/family

Focus on outreach (Servant Evangelism and Neighborhood Involvement)

Received many prophetic words and promises

Praying into the purposes of God

Launching of the Prayer Room as our main expression of corporate prayer

Season of transition in 2017