

LENT — “THE LITURGICAL SEASONS AND THE STORY OF GOD”

“WHY THE CHURCH MUST GATHER”

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Reflecting on His Work and the Storyline of the Bible

Read: Hebrews 10:19-25

Prayer:

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

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God has ordered that His people should gather in geographically definable assemblies with a biblical structure and mission. It is in the context of the collective gathering that the church remembers, returns and restores. The liturgical calendar is a means used by the church gathered to birth an answer to the question, “Why must/does the Church gather?”

The Scripture clearly speaks of the body of Christ as a consequence of His person and work. In fact, the entire Trinity is involved in the formation of this body. It is the Father who calls the body into existence, and it is the Son through whose activity the body finds basis, and by means of the Holy Spirit each member is intentionally placed into the whole (Eph. 1; 1 Cor. 12).

Because His body is both historic (i.e. apostolic) and global (i.e. catholic), there is an authentic “in time” witness to the greatness and goodness of God. Yet despite the body’s best intentions, there is equally and always the persistent pull away from the Story by the serpent’s seed. Satan’s ilk is embodied by an antichrist worldview and fallen flesh. In the church’s defense, she has created means so that she might remember the Story in which she lives. It is this annual reminder that enables those who have forgotten to return and to be restored through the renewing of their minds in the Story of God.

Yet many refuse to engage the means established by God and His church to embolden His people in their pursuit and journey. This refusal shows its face by failing to align individually with a biblical community or in coming, they fail to participate in the life of the community of faith. One is marked by **absence** and the other by **indifference**. Even a casual reading of the New Testament narrative shows the significance and importance of aligning oneself with a geographically defined assembly that seeks a biblical structure and mission. The church historic and global has always been made up of geographically distinct assemblies in various regions of the world. There are those who never align themselves with any local church or who attend various and multiple churches without ever fully identifying themselves with any one church. This is unfortunate and to their spiritual harm and that of their families. Are there those who appear to prosper spiritually in the absence of local church alignment? Yes, but these are the exception and not the pattern. The New Testament consistently places individual believers into geographically defined communities of faith who follow the oversight of the Elders who lead distinct flocks in the carrying out of God’s mission by advancing His kingdom.

It is within these local assemblies that are both historic and global that helps us remember the Story. Oh what a privilege is ours to sit with our brothers and sisters in Christ to hear and to see

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the Story through song, study and sacrament. This is why the Church gathers. She gathers to remember once more the one Story from God that makes sense of all our stories.

The church gathers to hear the Story, to remember that God created for His glory and that in creating, He put into play a rebellion against Himself, against whose backdrop His greatness and grace will be publicly displaced. God would crush this unholy insurrection and in crushing, provide the only means whereby the rebel could be restored as His people.

The church gathered is a consequence of God's redemptive activity. It is a part of His Story and thus intentional and planned. The church historic and global gathers on Sunday, and in gathering, they retell the Story. This retelling follows an intentional pattern of Advent, Lent and Pentecost. Neither the day nor the means are primary. It is the Story and its retelling that is preeminent, for it is the Story of God in three persons who creates and gathers worshippers for His glory who then will enjoy Him forever. By whatever means, the church gathered is to verbally and visually retell the Story.

One of the great passages of the Bible noting and thus celebrating this truth is found in Hebrews 10:19-25. The larger context provides the setting for this scriptural gem. Hebrews 1:1-10:18 speak of our Lord's priority in God's Story. What follows in Hebrews 10:19 are the consequences of His cross work. Time and space, however, limit us as to depth and width of study. It is enough to note how the book is written to encourage those who face persecution for faith. The author of Hebrews reminds them of the larger Story. God is its author, and He has written each part for His glory and their good. In the midst of this, they are to lay aside every weight and sin that would hinder them in their flight with and toward God. It is because of the woman's seed having crushed the head of the serpent that His people are now called upon to join together in their common search of their uncommon God.

It is because of the vicarious, voluntary and victorious provision (9:11-10:21) that we are to draw near (v. 22), hold fast (v. 23), stir up (v. 24), and not neglect the gathering for the purpose of mutual edification and encouragement (v. 25). All such activities are built on and flow from His activity. We can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). All such activities are to continue and increase because the Story is coming to its closure "in time". All of these activities are for His people in order to shield and enable His people to put off and resist sin (10:26). What is of interest is how each of these activities is done in community: "Let us". Is it possible to pursue apart from community? Sure, but why? Why would anyone separate themselves from the community of faith? It is on the heels of this exhortation we encounter the great "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. It reminds us of the "apostolic and catholic (universal)" witness. And from this gathered witness (Heb. 12:1), we are to "lay aside every weight and sin and run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Oh what glorious and weighty truth is found in the common pursuit within the community of faith as we look to Jesus! What "problem" can be so significant for one to withdraw from the community of faith?

For the sake of your soul, you are called to gather with His people for the purpose of pursuit. If you do not identify with a community of faith, then do so. If you are already attending, then engage. If you are already engaged, then continue and encourage others in their pursuit. Why? Because "we have a great priest over the house of God" (Heb. 10:21). Amen and Hallelujah!

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.