

Hebrews 10:19-25

"#whyGPC"

September 8, 2019

Rev. Lou Nyiri

Social media has taken the number sign / pound sign / or tic-tac-toe board and given it a whole new meaning ~ these two sets of perpendicularly intersecting parallel lines are now known as **hashtag**.

A hashtag is a label used across social networks and blogging which make it easier for users to find messages with specific theme or content. One creates and use hashtags by placing the hash character # (number sign / pound sign / tic-tac-toe board) in front of a word or unspaced phrase, either in the main text of a message or at the end. A search for that hashtag will bring up every message that has been tagged with it.

If you're familiar with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Blogging, then you've most likely encountered hashtags.

When a hashtag takes off across a social media platform it is said to be trending because a multitude of users are talking about and sharing it.

This morning, I want to talk to us about #whyGPC – why GPC is, as our traditional worship bulletin proclaims, "a church of caring, commitment and celebration."

I will encourage each one of us to think of the ways we resonate with this statement – not simply today – but throughout the course of this programmatic year which kicks off today & I encourage us to go one step further and use this hashtag in our social media posts – consider doing so today and in future days – take a photo with others you know and encounter within this church family and post it with #whyGPC is important to me / #whyGPC cares / #whyGPC is committed to / #whyGPC celebrates ... then describe what is happening in the photo you take and share across your social media platforms.

In fact, when you go to the ministry fair in fellowship hall (notice I said **when** you go...not **if** you go) look to the right of the Fellowship Team display there you will see a borrowed section of the bulletin board with some photos that use the hashtag #whyGPC – these photos are from events sponsored by this church...you might consider taking a photo of you and a few friends by that board and tag yourselves in the photo and use the #whyGPC is special to me ... then write something about why you consider this place to be a place where God's grace and call reside...

This is a really 21st century – non-confrontational way to be an evangelist – to be someone who shares the good news about what God is doing through God's people in this world...

That is, when God's people, like our Hebrews passage puts it: "...consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..."

Let's unpack this Hebrews passage a bit before naming some of the caring, committed, celebrating ways we here at GPC live out gratitude in response to God's gracious love.

Consider this – this is the second time the writer of Hebrews uses the word “consider” – it is a call for the readers to “think mutually about a matter.”

The consideration is how to provoke one another – to irritate one another – to “pester” one another – and while it can have a negative connotation – provocation here is a bit more positive in that it calls the reader to disturb his/her apathetic or fearful outlook from one of complacency into activity – in this case it is to produce love and good works.

The writer of Hebrews has chosen this strong way of communicating because this community had earlier been characterized as inattentive, neglectful and drifting.

This community needed reminding that along the way some felt it not necessary to gather for worship and to sustain each other through acts of mutual support. The reason for such inattentiveness is anyone's guess – though some fathomed it was a fear of persecution; feeling the group was non-essential to personal faith; discouragement over the delay in Christ's return.

Discouragement over Christ's delayed return is perhaps the stronger suggestion because the Hebrews writer names the reason to overcome a neglect of meeting together as to, “encourage[e] one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching” – a reference to the day of Christ's coming.

The early church expected Christ's return to be “just around the corner” to use modern parlance. The reminder of Christ's return was integral to sustaining the end-time expectation of the community. However, with the passing of time, the increase of hardship, along with the reality that Christ had not yet returned, these reminders, began to lose influence among some quarters of the community.

Perhaps that is why one of Hebrews most famous quotes is the first verse of the very next chapter, Hebrews 11:1, “Now **faith is the assurance** of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

The gathered community to which Hebrews author writes is reminded to keep meeting – keep encouraging – keep supporting – keep loving – keep committed – to keep, as my southern friends have taught me, *keep on keepin on*.

They're call is to be a community of caring, commitment and celebration.
And so are we – here at GPC!

Let's go in order – *caring*

I will highlight two ministries which provide what we could call **organized** ways of bringing Christ's love to the church and community: our deacons and Stephen ministry.

Our deacons are 12 members strong providing as set forth in Scripture sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. [Theirs] is a ministry of caring, a ministry of love, a ministry of compassion, and a ministry of prayer (Book of Order - G-6.0402).

In between monthly meetings, these twelve servants check in with members of this community anywhere from ongoing monthly contact, care and support for at least one care-receiver to quarterly or bi-annual check-ins with other care-receives to ensure our community keeps connected. Contact can range anywhere from telecare (phone calls) to in-person visits. Contacts could also include meal deliveries for those recently returned from the hospital, rides to medical appointments, emergency store runs for homebound members, delivering flowers to shut-ins, those hospitalized or neighborhood neighbors who are going through a tough time. Deacons also coordinate the Sunday morning Traditional Worship usher teams. To learn more about Deacons or to inquire about receiving Deacon assistance, please contact the church office OR stop by their table in fellowship hall.

Stephen Ministers are [those] with the gift to care for others.

Stephen Ministers use basic human wisdom while relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance to offer distinctively Christian care.

Dr. Kenneth Haugk began the Stephen Ministry program after he saw a need to assist Christ's church by training lay members to be Christian care givers.

He explained it this way at the Stephen Leader training course I attended,

"If your house catches fire you call the fire department. They come and extinguish the flames. The fire department can't stay at your home forever, because ultimately there will be another fire in another part of town to which they must respond. Thereby leaving you to sift through the ashes.

There are people who will go through the remnants and help you discern what to keep; what to discard; and how you can rebuild and move forward.

Friends, family, salvation army, red cross are some examples in this illustration."

Haugk, relates this to the church, by saying, "when a crisis arises members will call the church and someone from the pastoral care team will meet the family. However, they cannot stay indefinitely with the family. They will see them through the initial traumatic moments, however, at some future point they will need to be graciously excused to accompany another member. Pastoral Care Ministers know that each family could still benefit from having

someone to walk alongside, however, due to the urgency of need elsewhere, they must be allowed to graciously shift their focus on to the next concern.”

Stephen Ministers will walk alongside individuals – in the aftermath of the initial crisis – to help one move forward.

Following fifty hours training, engaging in regular group supervision and continuing education, a Stephen Minister prayerfully and faithfully seeks to offer practical human wisdom mixed with faithful Christian practice – a gift which is very much experienced as the grace of God.

Stephen Ministers are...The After People...A Stephen Minister is there:

...after you’ve washed and returned the last casserole dish.

...after the last child honks, waves and drives away – and the house seems incredibly empty.

...after you arrive home following the service and the emotions you’ve held off come crashing in on you.

...after the nursing home director says, “Welcome to your new home.”

...after family and friends have heard your story one too many times, but you still need to talk it out.

Stephen Ministers will walk alongside you – your friends, neighbors, coworkers or relatives – and provide comfort and support – for details on how to make this happen stop by the table in fellowship hall.

It is imperative to remember that deacons and Stephen ministers are not the only Presbyterians or people for that matter who provide ministries of sympathy and caring. All Christians are called to love their neighbors and care for one another. Anytime you pick up the phone, send a text or an email in order to reach out to a fellow traveler in this faith caravan we call Gettysburg Presbyterian Church **OR** in the local community for that matter – whether it is to see how they’re doing because you know they’re going through something **OR** you haven’t seen them around in a while – you are making good on what it means to be a caring community.

Commitment

We are committed to several things: I’ll highlight two categories – learning & serving.

One of my favorite tag lines for Presbyterians is: “We are life-long learners.”

How are we learning?

Fall Small Groups – what if so many people signed up today that the adult discipleship team had to find three or four new locations and times to meet the demand? Sign up and find out – let them get mad at me for the extra work – you just sign up (stop by the table in FH).

Sunday School/Christian Education starts today – classes are happening on all levels of our physical plant at many different times in the week – “Prodigal God” elective Sunday school – Christian Believer book studies – Discipleship Bible Studies – Advent Devotional writing (stop by the table in FH).

Don't forget how fellowship groups commit to walking together to grow in faith – high school and middle school, young adult and older adult groups – those groups are represented out in fellowship hall...

Where do we serve together?

Mission teams – out in FH are tables describing Mexico, South Dakota, High School, South Carolina, the newest arrival this year family mission camp – stop by the tables in FH.

Did you know we have a shawl ministry that creates blankets and shawls to cover recipients in a tangible way with God's grace. This ministry has sent shawls with our high school group for the past three summers to gift to homeowners when we finish a week at work camp. Prayer shawls are tangible symbols of love. As one stitches a prayer shawl, the knitter or crocheter petitions God to comfort, bless and heal the recipient...stop by the table in FH.

Which brings us to our final word: *Celebration*.

Where are we doing that kind of fellowshipping?

Well, stop by the table in FH and check out the fellowship events – but to mention a few:

September 15 – picnic, hymn sing and cornhole tournament – if you didn't return the form do so at end of worship and be there – it's kind of like a family reunion with people you choose to be around.

September 22 – guys and dolls musical from 2 to 4pm – we will laugh and sing together as we make memories to last a life time – let me know and we'll get you a seat at the show – but they're going fast so see me soon.

October 20 – potluck dinner and Family Feud fun – put a team together – fill out the survey that is being emailed to you or pick one up at the Fellowship table in FH – when have you ever heard Steve Harvey say, "100 Presbyterians Surveyed...top five answers on the board..."

November 17 – Combined Worship followed by fellowship...

September 21 / October 19 / November 16 – our hiking group will gather to explore God's creation & grow in faith – you want more information – stop by the table in FH.

All this talk about #whyGPC is a church of caring, commitment and celebration, reminds me of the African Proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

We've come a long way and we are called to go a lot longer way – together!

I gotta tell you, I'm glad to be on this journey with you – for together we encourage one another and spur one another on to love and good deeds – all the more as we see the day approaching...whenever that day may be!

#whyGPC...Let's make it trend!

Alleluia and Amen!