**Series: #Life Together**

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Hebrews 10:19-25

January 26-27, 2013

**“The Necessary Work of Provoking One Another”**

When I came here some twelve years ago, Village was going through a difficult time

-the church had lost a pastor who was here short term

-there was a perception that Village was failing

-there was a share of finger pointing—learning committees were assigned to figure things out

*-until something happened—something quite amazing*

-it happened one night in a board meeting

-one of the board members looked at every other member and said—

*“You know what our problem is? It’s our arrogance. We have had a history of great youth ministry (Son City), we’re doing impressive global ministry. We’re known for preaching the Word—we were even ready to write the book on effective pastoral transitions—and somewhere, we became proud”*

-and one by one, each man got on his knees and asked for forgiveness—and things began to change

point—he had the boldness to give an honest *assessment*

-and whether he realized it or not—he was carrying out an essential *one another*

-one the church is mandated to carry out—particularly in light of what God has done for us—*Hebrews 10:19-25—read*

-before the writer gives us another “mutuality command”, he reminds us of our PRIVILEGES as believers—

-unlike those who lived under the Law—separated from God

-those who are in Christ have gained access to God 24/7

-we, the formerly broken and alienated, and unwelcomed are welcomed into the very presence of God—verses 19-21

-and a privilege formerly reserved for the high priest once a year is now ours at any and every moment

-access to One in Whom we can now enter to find guidance, strength, encouragement, compassion—prayer

-but with privilege comes RESPONSIBILITY—

1. *we must DRAW NEAR—verse 22*

-seize the moment—grab the opportunity—take advantage of God’s open door

-draw near means to come close—don’t stay in the doorway

-don’t be timid—approach the throne of grace with boldness

1. *we must HOLD FAST—verse 23*

-hang on to our hope when things get tough, hold on to our core convictions without any wavering

-hold fast—for hopelessness is always trying to pull hope away—and replace it with despair

*-Christ’s finished work assures us there is no reason for despondency or hopelessness anymore*

1. *we must CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER—verse 24*

-for we enter this sanctuary with others

-and essential to this is that we are concerned for one another

-but more than concerned— the word implies we are taking notice, giving sustained and careful thought—*reading our situation, pondering one another*

-we are considering one another with the aim of provoking—if necessary prodding, spurring, goading

-inciting, irritating, aggravating, activating one another

*-for we need to be moved*

-we can often get set in our ways, become stale, dull, in a rut, too attached to the past, too committed to our comforts

*-this one another is intended to splash cold water on one’s complacency—open the eyes*-awaken us out of our dullness—expose things like sin

-it’s one of our most important “mutuality demands”

-and maybe some of us might say—I am already really good at this

-seems like I am always provoking, irritating someone

-but the text tells us that this kind of spurring is aimed at leading one another to love and good works

-and here’s why this matters—the body of Christ that is becoming a community of love that evidences itself in good works— *is a community that changes the world*

1. this is what Jesus said*—“Let your life shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”—Matthew 5:16*
2. what Paul said to the Romans*—“Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good”—Romans 12:21*

-it’s why we were created*—“For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works”—Ephesians 2:10*

1. how the pagan power of Rome will be overwhelmed*—“Conduct yourselves in honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they may by observing your good works, glorify God in a day of visitation”—I Peter 2:12*

point—this is how you respond to a culture that turns ever more hostile—*by taking God’s goodness straight into the darkness*

NY Times writer Nicholas Kristof’s op/ed piece—

“In these polarized times, few words conjure as much distaste in liberal circles as evangelical Christians—because they are often associated with blowhard scolds, self-righteous types who suffer myopia, anti-intellectualism…and worse”

-and yet—as he noted—*there are* those who are committed to love and good deeds—which led him to this conclusion—

*“Evangelicals are disproportionately likely to donate 10 percent of their incomes to charities, mostly church-related. More important, go to the front lines, at home or abroad, in the battles against hunger, malaria, prison rape, human trafficking or genocide, and some of the bravest people you meet are evangelical Christians who truly live their faith. I’m not particularly religious myself, but I stand in awe of those I’ve seen risking their lives in this way — and it sickens me to see that faith mocked at New York cocktail parties.”*

Love and good deeds really matter—why the exhortation

-every year I see this going on at Village—Renjy…

-illustration—recently a new couple asked—is this a safe place—*is this a place where there is love and good deeds?*

-we have a healthy board—there are no internal divisiveness, no skeletons in the closet I am aware of

-we have been faithful to the Word—careful attention is given to worship

-we have not compromised to tickle ears

-we have a clear mission, vision, and strategic plan—i.e. we are very intentional

-we have opened our facilities to the community—more than maybe any other church in Portland

This passage calls me to read our situation more carefully—

-are we doctrinally sound? Are we committed to the gospel?

-are we committed to our context?

-do we love one another? Are we a transformative culture?

-are we bearing fruit? Are we growing?

-it provokes the question—HOW ARE WE DOING?

1. *Average ATTENDANCE*

-our database tells us over 2200 are associated with Village

-but on average—1455 people attend Village on a given weekend

-and that is down from a year ago—and the year before that

-the average attendance in ethnic ministries (which includes Korean, Hispanic, Indian, and Chinese) is between 250-300

1. *Average return rate of NEW VISITORS*

-if we go by our cards—there aren’t many guests on a given weekend

-but more troubling—1 out of every 5 return a second time

-meaning 4 of every 5 new visitors do not come back

1. *Number of people giving their LIVES TO CHRIST*

-we are aware of 72 people who came to Jesus, with 56 baptisms

1. *Number of people JOINING VILLAGE*

-51 people joined Village in 2012

1. *Number of LIFE GROUPS*

-in some ministries loss—in some, gain

-overall—the growth has been—at best—flat

1. *Number of STUDENTS, CHILDREN involved at Village weekly*

-50 HS students/ 55 MS students/ 290 children

1. *Number of people involved in MISSIONS*

-58 went out on short term missions—18 for first time

-present missionaries supported—32 families

1. *GIVING*

-938 families gave something in 2012

-which tells us 60% give something—and 40% do not

-and 20% fund most of the ministry

-number of new givers—17

These metrics do some prodding—tell us things that may not be easy to hear

1. in some core areas, there is more regression than progression—we may not be growing as God would have us
2. we may not be as attractional as we think we are

-we do not seem to be moved to invite others—most of the new people I meet somehow found us on their own

1. there is a certain indifference to worship that is reflected in people not coming to pray, prepare—not coming in anticipation—not using opportunities like the alcoves in response to Word to do business with God
2. too many of us are still on the margins—either out of disinterest or out of our failure to integrate

*It’s not that this is a Village problem—*

-I’ve also discovered that churches in general are declining

-the very best data tells us that evangelicals are about 7-9% of the American population—not the inflated figures of 40-50%

-and Americans under 35 are four times more likely to be atheistic, agnostic, or nonreligious—meaning that tomorrow will be far more challenging

-an even more post Christian age that is changing at a rate that will only gain speed—that will become more biased against true Christianity

-consider these words from John Dickerson, a distinguished journalist turned pastor

*—The Great Evangelical Recession*-

*“The American church is moving with speed and momentum in a direction that includes lethargic discipleship, sputtering evangelism, abandoned unity, pending bankruptcy, and failed ambassadorship to the lost. We are in need of a historic course correction, lest we run aground”*

-either we will drift into impotence—as all too many churches—or step tenaciously toward kingdom power

-so let me do a little stirring to love and good works—

1. *we will need to be a more PARTICIPATIVE community*

-not a commuter church—not a drive through—that large churches can tend to become

-not people here until a better church comes along—there will always be better churches—and worse churches

-not a come when it is convenient—I try to go once a month

1. *we will need to be a more FOCUSED community*

-we may have to scale back what we are trying to do—both as individuals and as a church

-many of us are overextended—and sometimes you have to step back and ask—so how is that working out?

-we must stay focused on three things—no matter what

-worship—with the aim of a transformed heart

-teaching—with the aim of a transformed mind

-fellowship—with the aim of a transformed life—relational discipleship—where the one another’s are lived out

-FOR THIS IS HOW WE GROW

1. *we will need to be a more REDEMPTIVE community*

-committed to sharing Christ with people God brings into our lives

-not merely to make decisions—but to make disciples

-not complacent or apathetic toward this command—for this is Christ’s primary command

*-if we look back to 2012 and are hard pressed to think of a time we shared the gospel—than we have no reason to expect different numbers*

1. *we will need to be a more BROKEN community*
   1. that admits—we cannot do this without everybody

-everyone is necessary

* 1. that gets on its knees *more than we do to say*—we cannot do this without You God

1. *we will need to be a more AWARE community*

-aware of the enemy and his strategies to take our kids—demoralize our faith, defeat our church

-aware of what Christ has accomplished—He has broken the sovereignty of evil—so that all things are possible

-that once we work through the realities—we can move into a great position to bring the right change

-after all-He specializes in raising the dead—working through our weaknesses

**ARE YOU IN?**