**Scriptures: OT: Exodus 20:8-11**

**NT: Hebrews 10:19-25**

**GSPL: Luke 4:16-21**

Welcome to your Life Group and to our first Bible Study and conversation. I’m personally so excited about your gathering together in your group and growing in new friendships and growing in the word. Thanks for making this commitment to grow.

 Let’s start off our time together in prayer, “Heavenly Father, thank you for connecting to us in a powerful way in your son Jesus. Help us to understand what it means to connect to you and your people in Weekly Worship services. In Jesus name, Amen!”

 Our discipleship path here has been marked for us with the words Connect, Grow, Share. This path is leading us to Connect to God and His people in Worship, Grow in God’s Word through Life Groups, and Share Christ with our Words, Service and Resources.

 One of the best places to be on Sunday Morning is in our Courtyard. The courtyard is pretty quiet at 7:00 or so. At 7:30 a couple of guys come and hang out for a cup of coffee and a donut. The bell rings they head to worship and then things pick up. Children come with families getting ready for Sunday school. More and more people come and soon our community is gathered together. Donuts and coffee are abundant, but even more the conversation, the connections and the encouragement is clearly one of those things of God’s heart. Yet what goes on inside the worship centers transforms hearts and lives even more.

 We read in Hebrews 10:19-25 these words, ***19Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25not 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.***

 As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are called to regularly meet together for worship and community. We are called to connect to God and to His people. It’s amazing to me the confidence with which we approach God. It would seem that we would come to God with fear and trepidation. It would seem that our shortcomings and sins would keep us away from God and that God himself would have no time for us. But the writer of Hebrews tells us that we have confidence in coming before the Lord.

 I love watching a confident athlete. Recently I have been able to attend some college baseball games at Cal State Fullerton. The competition between the pitcher and the batter is awesome. The pitcher stands with great confidence on the mound. He glares at the catcher and the batter. He takes his sign, nods and then fires his pitch. Strike one. He oozes confidence as he rocks and fires. Strike two. Again he leans in nods his head at the appropriate sign and rips the ball by the batter. Strike three. He pitches with confidence, knowing that he has mastered his technique. He pitches with confidence, knowing he has disciplined his mind. He pitches with confidence knowing that his team is behind him all the way.

 So too we come before our Lord in confidence to worship him. We come to worship and God greets us in love. We talk about our sin and he delivers forgiveness. We say we need to hear an encouraging word, and God delivers his Scriptures. We say we need community and God delivers an entire family of faith with whom we share the very best things of faith and life. We come to God with the confidence that his son, our Savior Jesus Christ, cleans us up and makes us his children, and we can confidently come before him in worship. That connection is primarily from Jesus.

 I love going to worship. As a pastor I get to attend worship multiple times a week. It keeps me centered and focused on God’s working in my life and in our community at St. John’s. But I’m amazed at how people who call themselves spiritual and connected to God fail to worship regularly or weekly. Somehow they think that all the other events of life have priority over weekly worship. In Southern California we are driven by sports and sporting events. We are driven by gorgeous weather and wonderful destinations. We are challenged to keep the “main thing” the “main thing.”

**(Testimony Here)**

 For a disciple of the Lord Jesus regular weekly worship is not optional, it is the “main thing.” In Exodus 20, God talks about weekly worship. It is so important to us that he made it one of the 10 Commandments***. 8“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God…11For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”***

 As a part of the rhythm of creation God has created a need to worship and rest. We have time to work, time to play, time to sleep and a time to worship. God’s Word from the Old Testament into the New Testament to today, demonstrates the need and importance of worship for our lives.

 We live at break neck speed. We go go go. Then we wonder why we are tired and worn out. We wonder why we feel so disconnected from God and other people. We live our lives on a ragged edge and it becomes very difficult to respond to changes and challenges in life because we do so little to renew and refresh our bodies and souls. So God provides a Sabbath Day. A day of rest. Worship is not only an optional piece for humanity; it’s a necessary piece of life. Connecting to God in worship is one of the most critical pieces of maturing in faith and growing in your relationship with God.

 Not too long ago I was in church and didn’t “have” to be there. I was able to sit with my family and enjoy worshiping with my wife and daughter. I love when we get to do that. When I’m with my family I rejoice in putting my arm around my wife and observing the closeness that we have in our community. I love listening to my daughter sing and hearing the voices of all those singing and joining the hymns and songs of faith. I am reminded how connected I am to my family and to my family of faith.

 People wonder how to have a tight and strong family. My answer is that the connections that we deeply desire in our families begin with sharing the faith and sharing the same values. Families that worship together are strong in their connection. Sermons, hymns, prayers and praise songs become points of conversation and affirmation and our families grow stronger and more connected. I love when a parent emails me a question that a child has asked about a sermon, and I know that they are connecting to one another in conversation that makes a difference.

 Families are strong and tightly connected as they share the same values. Perhaps nowhere else are the values of love for God and love for others more apparent than in our weekly worship services. We value family, we value love, we value kindness, we value faith, we value service, and we value generosity. All of these values grow through the Word of Jesus and are strengthened as we gather together at the table of the Lord.

In worship God connects to us in powerful ways. He connects to us in the bread and in the wine, in the body and blood of Jesus, Lord’s Supper. He connects to us as His Words are read, He Connects to us as His Word is preached. He connects to us as His Word washes over us in the water of Baptism… cleansing us and connecting us with Jesus’s death and resurrection. Connecting us to an eternity of Worship!

 The challenge is clear. . For a number of people at St. John’s worship is about a once a month thing. Others are a little more connected and participate in worship more regularly… but sometimes it’s viewed as more of an obligation than an opportunity. Think how much stronger they would be if they were connected to God weekly and they viewed worship as a privilege and opportunity! The spiritual challenge is to become a weekly worshiper. What place does weekly corporate worship have in your life? If it’s not a priority for you right now….perhaps now it’s a great time to step up and start becoming a weekly worshiper. Each of us, as followers of Jesus, are called to be faithfully and regularly connected to God and His people in worship. God be with you and bless you as you deepen your walk with Jesus through worship.