

INTENTIONAL FAITHFULNESS: WHAT KIND OF SHIP ARE YOU PREPARING FOR?

I Corinthians 12:4-26

Intro

We are all equals...but some of us are more equal than others. Based off the George Orwell quote from 'Animal Farm' (and yes, I did have to look that up), it's one of those statements that many people (especially in a country like ours) struggle with, and yet ultimately show that they believe because of the deference that they show to those whom they perceive to be more influential, or the defeatism that is shown toward those who wield power.

Coming fresh off Election Day, how many of us are able to recall voices that would talk about all of us being equal (because my vote counts the same as anyone else who votes)? How many of us are also able to recall the voices that say that my vote doesn't matter because 'they' (the people in power) are going to do whatever they want to do regardless of how I may vote (because what does one voice, one vote matter)?

Exactly: we are able to picture people who have articulated both perspectives. Although I have to concede that the skeptical latter view feels like it's been picking up more than a little momentum over my lifetime.

The reason that I bring this up is because that skepticism, that 'we're equal...but they're more important (and yes, sometimes that gets flipped to become 'we're equal...just so long as everyone follow me') strain of thought is one that has absolutely made its way into faith communities of every variety.

But is it appropriate? Is it scriptural?

As we are about to hear, each of us are blessed in unique ways, but those unique gifts are meant to be used in concert with one another as together we follow the one and only head of the church, Jesus Christ.

Said another way: there will be some folks who get more headlines, but no one, is more important than any other. Hear these words and be reminded how we are to be in community with each other as we move together through the greater world. The scripture reads this way.

I Corinthians 12:4-26

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Matthew 24:36-44

Intro

As we have heard again how we are to come together as the body, a group of uniquely gifted people equally important in their life together, what is it that we are called together to do?

The short answer (as we are about to hear) is this: get ready for Jesus so that we are ready for his return.

But do we? Do we get ourselves and those whom we are equally connected with prepared for a time that we cannot know?

Or do we instead passively wait, falling into the very human hierarchical patterning of looking to be served, or feeling that we are always destined to serve others because we may be equal...but some are more equal than others?

What are we getting ready for? How are we getting ready? The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 24:36-44

36 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

'Intentional Faithfulness: What Kind of Ship Are You Preparing For?'

Alright, so let's get right into this. And I'm going to do by using an example that has stuck with me since it was mentioned to me about a month ago. When it comes to your faith, what kind of ship ride are you preparing for? Are you getting ready for a cruise ship or are you getting ready for a battleship?

I know, many of you are already thinking, 'this does not sound Biblical!' I hear you. Just come along with me for a minute.

When it comes to your faith, are you preparing like you are getting ready for a cruise ship or a battleship?

On a cruise ship, you are a passenger who is being served. You rely on others to get you where you are going, and hopefully you aren't going to fast because the point of the cruise ship is to be able to relax and have some fun. It's about sitting back, and letting others respond to your wants (may I have another drink please?), and what your wants are can be quite different than the next person's...and that's okay! Because that other person will have their wants met as well.

On a battleship, you are also a passenger, but you are trained, equipped, and empowered to do specific jobs. You are always on alert. Even when you are not actively serving, if the call comes out, you're on the move prepared and ready to serve in the way that you have been disciplined to do. What you do is important, and that's no matter what you do, because what you do serves and empowers those who are around on that battleship.

Now the reality is that everyone does have a part to play and that is regardless of whether you are on a cruise ship or a battleship...but the goal and the responsibility quotient couldn't be much more different.

So, back to the question I put before you all: when it comes to your faith, are you preparing like you are getting ready for a cruise ship or a battleship?

Because how you prepare ultimately sets you up for what you will inevitably encounter. If you prepare yourself to be pampered, what will you be ready for? If you prepare yourself to be able to serve both others in the body of Christ, and absolutely those whom you come into contact with who are outside of that body (because our neighbor is not just limited to the people whom we are led to agree with), what will you be ready for?

In terms of how that preparation is scripturally articulated, hear these verses from Ephesians 6: 'Fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'

Now I get that many of us will hear that and ask, 'so what does that mean?'

The answer begins in the very next verse: 'Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.'

Look, we have a working appreciation for what it means to strengthen our faith. We talk about it on a regular basis. In our not too distant past we had a spiritual growth campaign that talked about how we

are able to feed our faith so as to be prepared (Bible reading, prayer, being in community, giving back, and actively serving).

What we need to follow through on those action steps and actually prepare, as the Body of Christ, to be ready to serve the head of the body, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. If we are not intentionally and contemporarily prepared to serve Jesus (battleship), then we are, by default passively following, which leaves many of us looking to surround ourselves with the trappings of life that make us feel comfortable (cruise ship).

So again, when it comes to your faith, are you preparing like you are getting ready for a cruise ship or a battleship? As the church, what kind of ship, in our intentionality, are we getting ready to board?

Over the last few weeks I have started reading a book by Erik Larson entitled 'Dead Wake' which details the lead up and the events surrounding the sinking of the Lusitania back on May 7th, 1915 toward the beginning of World War I.

Now, I enjoy reading history, but, truth be told, this is a part of history that I know very little about. So, beyond the fact that I knew the Lusitania was a cruise ship, I knew very little else.

Needless to say, I have started to learn some things.

The first thing that I learned is that the ship was built intentionally to be fast.

At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, there was something called the 'Blue Riband Award' which was given every year to the company (re: country) that was able to have the fastest ship to cross the Atlantic Ocean. In 1903, Germany had won that distinction for 6 consecutive years. The British government was not okay with this slight. So they went in financially with the best cruise ship builder their country had (in today's dollars, the amount they loaned would equate to two billion dollars) to build what became the Lusitania and its twin the Mauretania.

There were concessions that the government received for this investment. The first is that the boats had to be fast (there's that pride thing). They wanted the ships to be able to average 24.5 knots per hour...in early trials they went 26 (that's just shy of 30 mph).

The second is that the hull was to be built to battleship specifications.

The third concession?

That in the event of war that these remarkable ornate cruise ships, the largest and most luxuriously appointed ships when they were first launched in 1907, could be equipped with navel artillery and be brought into service as an armed auxiliary cruiser. There were literally tie-down mounts on the main deck that were ready to hold upward of a dozen large guns.

And if you didn't know what you were looking at, you would have never known they were there.

The reason that I was drawn to using this example is that here you have a ship that was designed, in so many ways, for luxury, that was also equipped and prepared for use in a dramatically different way.

Now some of you who remember this part of history may quickly retort (and yes, this is a spoiler alert), 'but Ryan, the Lusitania was sunk!'

Yes, it was. And the reason it did, was because the preparations that were state of the art, became a frightening liability 15 years later.

The stopped preparing.

They stopped being diligent to the realities around them and went, to use a punny phrase, on cruise control.

So apply that same construct to your faith, and this works both in regard to your faith individually and absolutely collectively as the body of Christ as well, not only do we need to be prepared for the day that Jesus returns (thief in the night anyone?), but we need to be intentional about making sure that how we are living that faith out still makes sense for the world that we are now a part of. The preparation that we are called to have, which is intended for everyone in the community of faith as we are all equals in the body of Christ, are an on-going process. We need to be intentional...and we need to dig in so as to be intentionally equipped by God.

Now does that mean that we, as people of faith, and we, as a community of faith, need to be perpetually on a battleship footing?

I don't think so.

God is not against us being able to relax and recharge in the midst of our days.

But we need to allow our 'training' in the faith to be so ingrained in who we are that even if we happen to be in a season of cruise shipping, when the signal sounds, when the Spirit leads us, we are able to jump into action so as to be able to serve as is needed.

And that intentionality of being prepared in a lifelong reality that we support all those whom we are connected with in the body of Christ. All of us, unique as we are, need to be intentionally prepared to allow our faith to live out into the world. What kind of a life are you preparing for? Your response dictates how the world around you has the opportunity to experience the savior of all...through you.

Let us allow our intentional faithfulness to guide us in how we prepare from here on out.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, as we start to look at our life, there are too many days when we have to admit that the life that we are preparing for, does not line up with the life that You have called us to. Forgive us for those missteps and empower and embolden us so that we intentional prepare to follow You, actively showing and sharing Your love. It is in Jesus' name that we do pray. Amen.