

“Engage”

Hebrews 11: 8, 11, 23, 29, 32–12: 2

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The House of Hope Presbyterian Church

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Engage Sunday

This month, we are exploring our Core Values statement: Connect, Explore, Inspire, Engage, Belong. The process to develop this statement included 150 people talking about HOH, thirty people distilling that information, and then a small group of leaders specifically asking: What values will take us forward? How is the Spirit leading us?

These Values express something central about who House of Hope is, and are a vision of who, at our best, we want to be. Connect, Explore, Inspire, Engage, Belong. We are exploring these values this month. It is intended to be the beginning of an on-going discussion, dialogue and discovery.

Hebrews: 11 & 12 give us a challenge to engage us. “Run the race!” That makes me think back to my days on high school on the track team. It was a small school. We had some runners that were good runners in specific races. They were a shoe in.

Larry ran the quarter mile. Tim ran the mile. Rick, as a freshman, had no recognizable gifts for track. But he announced he wanted to run the two mile. No one else all that interested is such a grueling race. Rick started out running. While the rest of us may have had moments, out of the view of the coach, when we were not so much running, as moseying. That was not the case for Rick. He kept running, from the beginning of practice until the end of practice, and beyond. He was relentless. By the time of the conference championship, this freshman running the two mile, came in first. That’s passion. No one else had that passion. It was a thing of beauty.

What race do you love to run? What is your gift? What is your passion? What is your passion for ministry?

I keep top ten lists. One of my Top ten lists is the all-time list of greatest lies. At the top of the list, the all-time greatest lie is this: “One size fits all.”

God created the world with this marvelous diversity. What fits one person does not fit all. What fits you?

Jesus called disciples. The root word of disciple is discipline. Like an athlete, you have to work at it. The biblical book of Hebrews says faith is like a race: run the race, persevere, work hard, achieve excellence. Make it worth investing your life. Enter the race with passion.

David Brooks is an internationally known journalist. He worked hard, he was at the top of his profession. Then the rest of his life came tumbling down. He was in the valley of despair for 5 years. He asked: not what will make me more successful. He saw success for the more minor thing it is.

He asked: what will bring me joy? He began to focus on a life of meaning. He discovered a sense of call: to have a life with a true purpose.

He tells the story of George Orwell. Orwell too had lived a very surface life. Then he discovered writing. It was said of Orwell that it was as if there had been a fire smoldering in him that suddenly burst into flame. His calling to write took an unruly mob of appetites and organized them into an army of purposes and principles. His calling turned him into a man with a profound message.

That's what we hear God calling us to when the Bible says, "Run the race of faith with perseverance."

Hebrews gives a long list of inspiring people of faith and says, there is this cloud of witnesses who has come before us and left us this inheritance in life. And now it's our turn. What is our calling? What are our various callings in all our diversity?

To be a disciple, one has to be disciplined. You grow in this depth of ability and a depth of feeling. You feel the power of Christ's love at work in your life. What work of discipleship fits you? We all are at various stages.

Are you at the stage where you are new to faith? Great. Come learn about it. Rev. Wilson is teaching a new member class today. If that is your next step, I encourage you to take it.

We had a new Bible Study this last Wednesday night: I was delighted to have 45 people show up. It is a place to begin. Or to consider the Bible again. Get engaged.

Are you interested in a deeper study? Great! The Didier Seminar may be the place for you. They ask theological questions. They discuss who are some of the cutting edge theologians in the country. They read their books and they talk about them. They discern which one would fit the interests of the church right now, and invite profound thinkers. Their whole process is inspiring. This is their passion. This engages their hearts. It is their calling. Is it yours?

The Peace and Justice Committee is a relatively new ministry in the church. They talk about crucial social justice issues in the world. They ask: Who is hurting? What is going on in the world? They explore topics the Bible cares about: Homelessness. War and Militarism. Hunger. Gun Violence. Prison Reform. Women's Equality. Care of creation and environmental concerns. They do research: What does the Bible say about this type of topic? They look at policy statements that the Presbyterian denomination has written. They look at what other Christian and faith groups have said. They seek the mind of Christ on this: then they write it, talk about it, and send it to the session for approval. Given no heresy and the Session approves, they then seek to engage the church to talk together and work on these important faith issues. They seek to inspire people to work in these areas. Not that everybody would agree, but that this is a reasoned statement of Christian insight on this issue.

These people are passionate about these issues! Are issues of peace and justice your passion? If so, there is a place for you here.

Or maybe your passion is in a different kind of caring. You want to help take care of someone individually. The Grief Support group meets once a week, they have for 20 years. There is a passion here to help people deal with the loss of loved ones. When we go through that, we need community to walk with us.

It is a powerful and profound experience. Perhaps you would like to be a care giver. The Stephen Ministry is a group of laypeople trained by Rev. Julia Carlson, a group of people who learn about how to listen and how to care for people who find themselves in times of challenge and difficulty. The Stephen Ministry is a very disciplined kind of discipleship sharing in compassion and hope. If that is your passion, there are people who can help you embody that love.

Project Home is about hands-on caring for the homeless. Homeless families find a home at House of Hope for a full month. Do you want to walk beside them for a while, and give them hope? Is that your passion? You will have the opportunity to get engaged.

A lot of churches are struggling these days. House of Hope is thriving. Why? People bring their passion here. They get engaged. The Gallup Organization studies this phenomenon. They have discovered that there is a significant difference between people who are members of a church and people who are engaged in their church.

Those who are engaged are 20% happier than those less engaged.

Those who are engaged are 10% more likely to invite someone to join the church.

They have a higher sense of pride in their church, so it feels very natural to invite someone.

They are more connected.

They are freer with their resources.

Getting engaged matters for your spiritual journey.

David Brooks, in his book, *The Second Mountain* says that we used to live in a culture where the dominant feeling was "We're all in this together." Now we live in a culture where it either feels as if we are all alone, or even that we are in a bunch of tribes at war with each other. But there is another way: the way of vocation, calling, discovering our community, and engaging in the calling of growing together and serving together.

This is an invitation: to connect more deeply with your sense of calling, and to engage the church and the world in ways that bring us together.

God has given us this call. The decision of whether or not we will answer is ours. With the book of Hebrews, I invite you to hear the invitation and challenge: Run the race with passion!