

He would always just barge in. If there was someone in the study with me, if there was a meeting happening it did not matter. If the door was closed and he knew that I was there he would just bang and pound on the door until I opened it. There was no way of ignoring him. He usually just needed some food (we had a food pantry) or something like new socks. He had an uncanny knowledge of when the 99 cent store got in a new shipment of “his” socks. He would ask for a couple of dollars, go and get two pair of socks and then return with them, show them to me and give me the receipt. He was always polite, always thankful and patient—once he got in. His boldness was in getting in.

We are able to have the same sense of boldness in dealing with our God. Or as the writer of Hebrews puts it: *“we now have confidence to enter God’s presence (Sanctuary).”* We are now part of the family. I do not think it is a coincidence that these past few weeks my personal Bible readings have been in Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These books include the process for Aaron and his sons to minister before God in the Tabernacle/Temple. They deal with the cleansing and anointing, and the sacred garments that must be in place before they enter the presence of God. And then, only the High Priest can enter the Holy of Holies once a year. There was NO confidence in coming before God. They entered the presence of God with fear and trembling.

How many of you have been to court? (several hands). I have only been once. It was small claims court. The church had had siding put on and it had blown off in a windstorm. It was discovered the contractor had only used a limited amount of nails to secure it on near the peak. He would not come and repair the damage—small claims court. Even though we won and it was our decision to go before the court it was a daunting experience. In his courtroom the judge was in control! In the Temple God was in control – as in all the earth!

Hebrews states that we are able to come before God with a new boldness made possible by Christ. Christ came and makes it possible for us to see the true nature of our God: Love. Now this is not the image the world or Israel had of God. But because of Christ we can now come *“with true hearts in full assurance of faith”* (v. 22). It is not because of anything we have done or accomplished but because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. We can now come boldly. Pounding on the door if necessary. We don’t need to wait and go in.

The first time Diane visited my uncle and aunt with me she was concerned that I did not knock on the door. I just turned the handle and walked in. I had never knocked, the door was seldom locked and if it was I knew where the key was. We always entered, with boldness. This is how we are now able to come into God’s presence!

What do you do when you provoke someone? (responses: anger, enrage). Good, you got it right. The first definition of provoke is to anger, enrage or exasperate. We usually expect a negative reaction when we provoke someone. The NRSV though says we are now to: *“provoke one another to love and good deeds.”* The second definition of provoke is to stir up, arouse or call forth. We are to call forth love and good deeds in one another. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says: *How inventive can we be in encouraging love and helping out?”*

We are to encourage people to love and look for ways to serve Christ. International Ministries puts out an update on where in the world people can serve both as volunteers and as missionaries. We know that Peggy went to China as a volunteer and served in Christ’s name. We encouraged her, commissioned her and prayed for her while she was serving.

This is what the writer means when he says we are to *“provoke one another in love and good deeds.”* If you read the November Weaver you know that I suggested that our pledge cards should have a place where we not only record an amount but also a place where we can

pledge our time. (Haven't seen them yet so not sure if they have this section or not.) This is a part of who we are as the family of God.

We need to honor and uphold those who serve in whatever capacity. I recall an episode of Reba where her eldest daughter decided she wanted to serve in some way. She selects a local soup kitchen and is disappointed when she is assigned to wash the dishes. She laments she wanted to serve somewhere she could be seen!

Not far from the truth. The first couple of years we were in Pasadena we were alone on Thanksgiving or had time to help in some way. We discovered a mission that served thousands of meals to the homeless and needy outside at a local park (you can get away with that in Pasadena in November!). We volunteered. We showed up and were escorted to a long, long line. We commented that we were not there to eat but to serve. Our escort informed us that this was the line for those waiting to serve. We would serve for about 10 minutes and then would move along – there were almost more waiting to serve than waiting to be served. While in the line we learned that some were getting college credits for serving, others thought it was the thing to do and others were like us – just wanted to give some of ourselves.

The next year we called and asked where they really needed help. The director paused and asked, “Do you really want to help?” We responded, yes. She then said that if we really wanted to help we should show up after the meals had been served. “No one ever stays around to help clean up. This is where we really need help. After everyone is gone and the trash needs to be picked up, the tables and chairs put away, etc.” If we really wanted to help this would be when it was most needed. We showed up with a handful of others.

How do we provoke people of love and service? We do it by working along side with them. We share in the process and get our own hands dirty. We work and walk beside.

Now the one time the Philippine Xtreme got angry with me was the day they were at Habitat for Humanity in Manila. I got them to the place, got them set up and then left. Usually I stayed with them but... In a way it was their fault. They were supposed to have secured visas to stay in the Philippines beyond 21 days – they had ignored this and we had to file for the visas after their arrival. There was no problem with this except it meant I had to go and pick up their visas so they would not be fined for being in the country illegally. The day they visited Habitat for Humanity was the day their visas were ready. Now, getting across town in Manila can take all day! It did. But when I got back they were angry. I had not shared and worked along with them.

I should note that they had expected to build with hammer and nails. However, in the Philippines the houses were made with cinder blocks and mortar. Their day was spent lugging buckets of mortar to the masons! They were right in a way. I should have stayed and worked with them. That was the original plan.

Another way we provoke one another to love and service is to encourage one another. The writer of Hebrews says that we are not to forsake the assembling together. This is partly for worship and partly to provoke and encourage one another in love and deeds of service. It should be in worship that we acknowledge the service of each to the other. It should be here that we pray for those who are serving and the many ways they serve. Service does not just happen inside these walls.

On Thursday I dropped something off at the MLT Elementary School. The principal saw me and went out of his way to talk to me and thank me and you for the Wings to Reading program. He said how great this was. How much it helped his kids (and he sees each one as his). He also said how thankful he was for us as a congregation and the work we are doing.

I am glad that Rebecca is here this morning. We need to acknowledge all that she does for the Rett foundation. We also need to uplift and support her with our prayers. It is a part of who we are – being the living Christ in the world.

We are called to love and serve. We are able to enter boldly into God’s presence. We are able to go boldly in the name of Christ. We no longer need a priest or mediator to stand between us and God. We can bang on the door if needed. We are called to love and serve in Christ’s name. If we are going to change the world we need to love the world and serve it in Christ’s name. We need to “*provoke one another to love and deeds of service.*”

The Psalmist said it this way: “*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forever more*” (16:11).

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Parallel Bible, Zondervan, 2004, 2006