

This past week,

a local food truck, Craft Taco

—have you heard of them?

Well, this past week,

Craft Taco, parked their truck

in the parking lot

of Dockside Seafood on 127

and set up to sell tacos, burritos

and left-over broth.

And when I say left over broth,

I mean they had 100 gallons of broth

to get rid of.

On Facebook they said,

they'd sell the broth for \$.50 per 32oz cup.

They claimed, it would be perfect

for marinating meat,

using in a crockpot with a roast,

or a good base for soup.

They cook their Birria beef in this broth.

Craft Taco noted,

they would dump what they couldn't sell.

Y'all, they ran out.

People showed up with 5-gallon buckets!

The line was longer than they've ever seen!

Comments on their Facebook page

declared the broth was liquid gold.

You can do a lot with that broth.

And enough people knew that

and came ready to stand

in a long line to get some.

Good broth or a good base

is important, right?

I have favorite brand

of chicken stock that I use
and Tripp will tell you,
any mention of buying another brand
will lead to a tirade
about the inadequacy of other bouillon.
A good broth can make or break your stew.
It can enhance the flavor
of rice or pasta.

Have you ever thought
of using broth to boil chicken?
Tripp's grandmother does this
for the chicken in her chicken salad
and you can taste the difference!
Then you have like super broth
left over to freeze.

Here's my best kept secret,
I cook my grits in broth.

Broth by itself is just okay.
And I'm sure there are legit cooks out there
who would balk at my overuse of broth.
But used in the right recipe
and oh wow,
you might take an ordinary dish
all the way to gourmet.

In a similar way, Hebrews 13
is telling us how to take our congregations
from bland, lukewarm, and mediocre
to meaningful and invigorated.
The whole 3-point sermon has gone out of style,
but if any of you came here
with any hint of nostalgia things morning,
Hebrews offers us 3 points
for a healthy, vibrant church

The first step toward congregations
of meaning and liveliness
is worship:

“Through [Jesus], let us continually offer
a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips
that confess his name.”

That verse is summed up in one word;
worship.¹

I bet I can guess
what you think of
when I say worship.

But what we are talking about
is **not** the 1-hour slot on Sundays
that you find yourself in right now.

No, thinking like that
is just buying a \$.50 cup of broth
and thinking you’ve now got yourself
a cup of bisque.

Our 1-hour time slot is just the base,
just the broth.

Worship, is broader,
it’s a good bit heartier than that.

The late Frederick Buechner says,
to worship God is to serve [God].

One way
is to do things for God
that God needs to have done
—run errands,
carry messages,
fight on God’s side,
feed God’s lambs, and so on.

The other way to worship
is to do things for God
that you need to do
—sing songs,
create beautiful things,
give up things that ought to be let go of,

¹ Gray Temple, Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 4; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 Eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) pg. 16

talk to God,
tell God what's on your mind and in your heart,
and in general,
 rejoice in God
 and make a fool of yourself
 just because you love God.²

That is worship.
It is more than just Sunday morning.

Worship is taking the broth
 and making good use of it.
 Worship is doing the things
 God needs you to do
 but it is also doing the things
 you need to do
 to fully be who God created you to be.

For far too long,
 we've taught ourselves
 that the correct order
 is God, others, self.
 Well, I'm just not sure that is correct at all.
 That kind of step ladder
 doesn't let God embrace all that we are.
 It puts God a tad out of reach
 and that's not where God is!

We've taught ourselves,
 if it is something you enjoy,
 it needs to come last on the list.
 But here's the truth
 we already know.
If you aren't taking good care of you,
if you aren't eating well,
 getting enough exercise and water,
 if you aren't getting enough sunlight

² Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC, revised and expanded* (Haper Collins New York, NY 1993)
pg. 122

and doing what brings you joy
—you're bound to shrivel up.
You're bound to wither.
And then, might I ask,
what good will we be in the world
—all shriveled and withered?

God wants to be
in every, single thing we do.
So, when we are taking good care of ourselves
and when we doing what bring us joy
we come alive and we blossom.
And the world needs people
who are alive!

Our joy is God's joy
—it is just that simple.
People coming alive
are what God needs in the world
and when we are alive,
we will want others around us
to experience that same aliveness.

That's the kind of worship
that leads to our next step.

Did you know that Biblical scholars
think that the book of Hebrews
is just a really long sermon?
And this final chapter of Hebrews
goes right to the heart of it.
And this part!
Strangers, prison,
torture, money, marriage
—sounds like a Lifetime movie.

But worship leads us
to the second point in the sermon,
fellowship.
The Hebrews preacher knew

that these words would be helpful
—because when a community comes together
...well, you know what happens
when a community comes together!

Amazing things happen!
Programs are born
and faith and study can blossom.
But then there can also be disagreement,
programs run dry and aren't attended
—faith and study can wane.

Then again, when the community comes together,
we teach and pass on our faith
to our children and youth.
We hope they find a loving and safe faith home
where they learn to see the world
through the lens of Jesus!

But what they sometimes see in here
is dissention
and what looks and smells like hypocrisy.
Bickering over things like carpet colors and pew Bibles;
where to plant trees
and where we can fit a playground.
Right?

But rather than seeing
those times of tension as negative,
our ebb and flow of agreement and disagreement
can be normal signs of a living church.

An active church
that cares deeply about hungry people
and about the welcome others see
when our children are playing
in the front yard.

Churches are really just people anyways;
people in relationships.
And relationships need guidelines and grace,

boundaries and flexibility;
loving reminders of where we
should always circle back to.
The fellowship of our relationships
can get messy and sticky
but fellowship is also one of
the greatest gifts in our lives.

So, the 13th chapter starts off
with an excellent reminder
to a church alive and vibrant
—let mutual love continue.

Let mutual love
be the earthy foundation of this community.

We won't always agree,
we won't always get along.
We won't always get it right
...whatever getting it right even means!

Fellowship is fraught with holes and pitfalls.
But Hebrews points to a church community
knowing something about what it means
to be bound by
and rooted in
the mutual love in Jesus Christ.

In worship,
in fellowship,
we will not be perfect,
but we will bound together.

Mutual love sets the boundaries
for the community rooted in Christ.
It guides the worship.
It steers the fellowship.
And then mutual love
gives birth to meaningful and enlivened congregations
through ministry—the third point
Hebrews makes.

“Ministry” sounds like church work,
but again, that is thinking
broth is chowder.

Ministry is practicing over and over,
training yourself really,
to look into the eyes of people around you
and see them
as the very image of God.

Stranger or sister,
friend or foe—

Hebrews explains that in
the ministry of the church
we are to entertain the possibility
that you could meet a messenger of God
in the face of someone else.

So, if encountering a messenger from God
is the constant possibility,
then we need to be prepared
to offer hospitality
of the heart and home.

Open the door of your heart to let people in.
Make your home a place
of safety, security, rest, and joy
for everyone who lives there
and anyone who might visit.

Think of ministry
as a posture of belonging—
radical belonging

where there are no initiation fees
or monthly charges.
A radical belonging with no form to fill out,
no boxes to check,
no online signature required
to understand these terms.

In ministry,
belonging is the first and final word.

This kind of belonging,
this kind of ministry
expands outward
to all the people you can think of
and all the people you can't.

In the worship and fellowship of Jesus Christ,
the ministry of the church
is a belonging that
encompasses and embraces
every type of person
wherever they are,
whoever they are.

It allows for a person's full expression
and in the ministry of belonging
the church commits
to reaching beyond its own
walls and doors.

Think of those who need
that belonging in their lives.

Think of prisoners,
prisoners to addiction
and toxic relationships.
Think of prisoners to wealth
and prisoners to poverty.

Think of prisoners to loneliness and depression;
think of the prisoners
who can't put down their mask
and show you their real selves.

Think of that torture of mind, body, and spirit
that we encounter
from those things.

What if ministry meant
those prisoners belonged to us?

What if those prisoners
were our daughters and sons,
our sisters and brothers,

our mothers and fathers
—what ministry,
what belonging to us
does our community,
bound by mutual love,
have for them?

Worship, fellowship, and ministry.

They bleed together and form the life blood
of the vital and thriving church community.

Without these three,
we run the risk of shallow,
lifeless communities
where the hungry and thirsty come
and find just a cold cup of broth.

Friends, we have so much more to offer.

So much more to offer
to each other
and to Hickory!

In this sermon,

the preacher of Hebrews
reminds the faithful to look at the leaders
who speak the word of God
and imitate their faith.

Friends I am not saying this
so that you will imitate me
—but look at Jesus,
imitate him!

He's the same yesterday,
today
and forever!

The more we look and admire him
the more we will start to act like him
and to appear as he does
out in the world.

Think of what our church would look like,
if we imitate Jesus—the worship,
doing for God
what God needs done
and doing what brings us joy
because that's what God made us for!

Think of what our church would look like,
if we imitate Jesus—the fellowship,
coming together
just as we are
alive and green with God's growth
in our lives
and rooted together
in mutual love!

Think of what our church would look like,
if we imitate Jesus—a ministry,
where strangers, friends, prisoners,
outcasts, executives,
and everything in between
knew they belonged to us?

Think of it!
A line of people,
hungry and thirsty,
waiting for what God,
in power of Jesus Christ,
can offer through First Presbyterian?

Well, I hope they'll bring a 5-gallon bucket.