What Do We Do Together?
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Sermon, Service of the Word
General Chapter Retreat 2024

In the British television series, "*Call the Midwife*" there is an episode in which one of the sisters has been out late at night attending a birth. On her way back to Nonnatus House, she inexplicably stops by the side of a dark road - where she is viciously assaulted.

We next see her at dawn, on the pavement, slowly regaining consciousness, after which she makes her way – dazed - back to Nonnatous House. In the aftermath of the trauma, we learn *why* she had stopped by the side of the dark road.

Realizing that the other sisters were then at Compline, she stopped to join with them in prayer.

What do *we* do together?

We as members of this Society pause, hopefully each day, not merely to pray *for* each other, but *with* each other. That's what we do together. Or at least part of what we do together.

After watching that episode of *Call the Midwife*, the plural pronouns of the daily offices have taken on new and precious significance for me.

It might be said, in fact, I have become somewhat obsessed with the plural pronouns. Prayer is what we do *together*. And the plural pronouns of the offices reflect that. We do not pray alone, even when we are alone.

And most assuredly, we do not come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses. Ours is not a "me and Jesus" religion, sharing a joy that "none other hath ever known."

We pray *together*, my baptismal brothers and sisters. Even when I am all by myself I do not pray "My Father who art in haven" but "Our Father…" That is humbling, and gives a salutary corrective to my tendency to function as a lone-ranger. Those plural pronouns hold in check my arrogance and pride, my loneliness, and my sometimes all overweening sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency.

The priests of the Old Testament also did their thing "together". But as the lesson from Hebrews describes what they did together, it sounds perfectly dreadful to me. "*Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins*."

Doesn't that sound positively horrific? How would you like that job? Boring… totally useless and completely ineffective? Yet, alas, truth be told, that is the way some would characterize what we do together, day after day, again and again… over and over through the year: boring, useless, and ineffective.

And those are some of the more charitable characterizations of what we do together.

How to ***not*** be that?
Only through Jesus, who has offered himself for all time, a single sacrifice for sin… who has perfected for all time those who are sanctified… who will remember our sins and lawless deeds no more… and

who is now waiting for his enemies to be made a footstool for his feet. (Which would suggest that we can wait too, but that's the subject for another day.)

How to **not** be boring, useless, ineffective, or worse in what we do together. That's the question.

Only with that Jesus, who is sufficient… Jesus, who is all sufficient… Jesus who alone is sufficient.

Anything other than Jesus that we do together is really boring, useless, ineffective and, frankly, just none of our business as pastors. Anything other than Jesus that we do together will, to quote Don McClain in this 1971 classic rock-song, *American Pie*, send "Satan laughing with delight". Anything that is not Jesus that we do together, is deadly for the world.

What do we do together? Well, we hold fast to the confession of our hope, without wavering, for Jesus who is our hope, has promised his faithfulness without wavering. We hold fast to Jesus, alone. That's what we do together.

And then, strangely, in that hope, according to Hebrews, we provoke one another.

Say what?

Provoking. That isn't a good thing, is it? Wouldn't think so. It's a bad thing. Should we really be doing that to each other?

I'm provoked by those in the church who do not hold fast to the confession of our hope and the promises of their ordinations. I'm provoked by the state of our country and its politics. Sometimes I'm provoked by my family.

Hey, I'm even provoked when I go to COSTCO to buy something and can't find it because they keep moving products all around and refuse to put up signs to find stuff.

But apparently being provoked can be a good thing because we (plural) are told to provoke each other, to love and to good deeds. That's the only place that word is used in the New Testament as far as I can tell.

Yet Hebrews seems to introduce just a slight caveat on that admonition to provoke one another. "Let us *consider* how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." Consider. Apparently provoking one another to love and good deeds requires some thought, some planning, well, some *consideration*.

Apparently we need to take different approaches to provoking one another to love and good deeds. What works with one may not work with another. I think that's what we call "pastoral care", but just calling it "wisdom" might suffice.

Sometimes *considering* how to provoke one another to love and good deeds is a real challenge – even a messy one. But that is no excuse not to do it. The imperative is clear. We are to provoke one another, to love and good deeds.

What do we do together? We don't neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some. We encourage one another. Now, I won't pretend to speak for others. But I could not survive without the encouragement you give me, or better said, that the Holy Spirit gives me through you.

What do we (plural pronoun) do together? We pray together; we hold fast the confession of our hope together; we provoke one another to love and good deeds together; together we encourage one another.

And all of this we do, all the more, as we see the Day drawing near.

That is what we do together. Can I get an "amen?"