

September 17, 2017
Church: What We Do and Why We Do It
1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:1-16

Jesus said to Peter, "*On this rock (Peter's confession of faith in Jesus) I will build **my church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*" (Matthew 16:13-18). In the New Testament, people who come to faith in Jesus are the **church**, God's called out and called together people. Last week we talked about ***who the church is – WE are the church.***

1. The church is God's idea.
2. You can't separate being a Christian from church any more than you can separate being a person with being a human being.
3. Church is not something you go to. It's someone you are.
4. The church is messy.
5. In the Church, we need each other.

This week, we will think about ***what the church does.*** We could focus on some of the specific things we do – worship services, educational ministries, mission and service locally (soup kitchen, food banks, housing, hospital, chaplaincy, refugees, etc., etc.), regionally (Mill Creek, CBWC), and globally (Cuba, Days for Girls, Lisa Ratzlaff (Zambia), Canadian Baptist Ministries – She Matters). In days to come, we will think about these specific things we do and why we do them – from communion to baptism, from mission to membership.

This morning I want to zoom out a bit and think bigger picture. I want to circle back to Jesus' words to His disciples: "***I will build **my** church.***" We are ***His*** church. ***He*** is building ***His*** church in and through us. What does that mean for what we do and why do it?

The Church is all about Jesus

The creator of the church, the head of the church, the message of the church, the heart and soul of the church, the whole reason for the church's existence is Jesus. Jesus is what the church – you and I – are all about.

One of the images the New Testament uses to describe the church is as a body – the body of Christ: ¹²*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ ...* ¹⁵*Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.* ¹⁶*And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.* ¹⁷*If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?* ¹⁸*But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.* ¹⁹*If they were all one part, where would the body be? ...* ²⁷*Now **you** are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

As the body of Christ, we are the Jesus most people see.

We, the church, are an imperfect reflection of Jesus. People in church sin and fail. Some people have been hurt by people in church. Some people have felt unfairly judged and unloved by people in church. Some people feel we are boring or irrelevant. Some people look at us and don't recognize much of Jesus in us. What do we do about that?

1. ***Sometimes the problem isn't us.*** I read a review that said, "*Millennials are not interested in a celestial Jesus with a permanent smile and open arms, unconcerned with the goings-on of planet Earth. We've heard about that Jesus our entire lives, and we're not buying it. Do you know what we would buy? Jesus the man, Jesus the prophet, the Jesus that fashioned a whip of cords and overturned the tables of the money changers for making God's house a den of robbers. The Jesus that challenged the establishment and paid the ultimate price. The Jesus that took up the cross of the poor, the weak, and the marginalized in the name of God.*"¹

The author makes valid points. But he has a very selective picture of the Jesus he wants "to buy" (interesting phrase). His Jesus challenges other people, but not him. It's a "drain-the-swamp" Jesus, as long as everyone else but him is in the swamp.

2. ***Often the problem is us.*** Do we know Jesus any better than this struggling soul? Is our Jesus simply a celestial being with a permanent smile and open arms?

After I read this piece about Millennials, I began rereading the Gospel of Mark very slowly, really looking at Jesus. The real Jesus. He does take up the cause of the sick, suffering, poor, weak, foreigners, and marginalized in the name of God. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus does challenge political and religious leaders for corruption, arrogance, self-righteousness, racism, smug superiority, lack of compassion and care for the poor, failing to care for immigrants, indifference to justice, lies, and lack of integrity. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

As I read through Mark, though, I noticed Jesus – the real Jesus – is much more than just someone who challenges the establishment and pays the ultimate price.

Jesus teaches people about the kingdom of God, faith in Him, life, holiness, and love. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus calls ***all*** people to repentance, forgiveness, and faith (not just the establishment, especially people – like the author above – who thinks Jesus should be chastising "other" people, not him). This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus spends a lot of time with ordinary, hurting people. He touches them, cares for

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-chiakulas/churches-millennials-if-they-just-did-this_b_8215846.html

them, feeds them, heals them, teaches them, encourages them. He loves them. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus demonstrates a new approach to leadership: God-centered, people-centered servanthood, integrity, humility, mercy, and grace. It's about people, not money, power, or politics. This is what Jesus and the church in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus models how to "speak the truth in love" – God's truth in dynamic tension with unconditional, self-giving, sacrificial love. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus teaches us that true life is about loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving our neighbour. True life is about faith in Jesus, not faith in the markets, financial advisors, or politicians. True life is about allowing His Spirit to fill and shape every part of our lives. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

These things have practical implications for what we do day to day, week by week. But the bigger issue is, if we are the body of Christ – if we are the Jesus people see – are we doing what Jesus would do if He were in our shoes?

Growing Up

Paul writes, *"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all ...*

¹¹ Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:1-16).

People in church can be "like infants." They may not be modeling maturity. Other priorities and values than Jesus can come to define us – and we're blown here and there. How can that happen? It can happen when our message becomes one of supporting a particular political or social vision rather than faith, confession, repentance, and forgiveness by Jesus. It can happen when our message changes from good news of love and mercy,

new life and new hope in Jesus, to a message of fear, anger, judgment and self-protection.

It can happen when a church gets more concerned about maintenance than Jesus' mission and ministry to people. All the things we do – our facility, staff, programmes, services, classes – help us do the work of the Kingdom; they are not ends in themselves.

Growing in maturity continually brings us back to Jesus. We really want to know Jesus and other people to know Jesus. We really want to see Jesus' love, justice, and grace become real in an angry, hurtful, unjust world. The prophet Amos, in a passionate speech on everything from unfair taxes to going-through-the-motions worship, blasts, *"Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."*(Amos 5:14, 23-24).

Growing in maturity brings us back to our purpose and mission: *"Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all ..."*(Ephesians 4:1-6). We get our priorities straight. We put aside political and cultural differences, cast down our idols, and we be the people of Jesus.

Growing in maturity means we speak the truth in love. First, we need to hear Jesus speak the truth in love **to us**. The truth is **we** need a relationship with God, but have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The love is as we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us: *"¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"*(John 3:16-17).

Second, we share this truth, this good news about Jesus, with people around us in love. The truth is: everyone (including us) needs a relationship with God but has sinned and falls short (including us). The love is: as we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us. We combine this message of new life with the Jesus' passionate concern to bring love in practical ways: food, healing, encouragement, restored relationships, laughter, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion.

This is what we do: we are Jesus – we try to be like Jesus – in our hurting world. ***This is why we do it:*** we are His body. Are we perfect yet? Absolutely not. It's an impossible mission – we'll never get it right. But, in the power of the Spirit, we confess, we repent, and we press on. How can I be more like Jesus? How can we be more like Jesus? The church is us: how can we be part of the "solution" – building His Kingdom?