

September 16, 2018
WHO are we all about? Jesus.
Philippians 2:1-11

“Church” – what’s it all about anyway? Isn’t it easier just to sleep on Sunday morning ... You know, camp was so much more exciting, and church is so – well – you know ... Church would be OK, if _____. I really don’t like _____. I really wish they’d do more _____.

As we get things going again this Fall, we (the staff) have been asking ourselves hard questions around church, too. Why do we do what we do? Is it worth it? Does anybody care? Is it relevant? What are we trying to accomplish?

We can talk about the church structurally – it’s a building – and we might have goals for the building. But that is not what church is really all about, is it?

We can talk about the church organizationally – it’s an organization with a council and staff and budget and all that – and we might have goals around those things. But that is not what church is really all about, is it?

We can talk about the church as people – it’s us; we’re a family, a community, friends, encouragers, helpers, groups, volunteers – and we might have goals around those things ... “The church is people.” But even that is not what church is *really* all about.

This passage in Philippians (2:1-11) challenges us to think about **WHO** the church is really all about ... it’s not about a building, budget, even us, the people (though these are all very good, necessary, and important). The church is really all about Jesus ...

Jesus is WHO the church is all about

“Jesus was in very nature God but did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”(2:6-9)

The church is about Jesus – fully God and fully human. Ultimately, of course, if we push harder, the church is all about God ... To be Jesus-centred is really to be God-centred, because God, we believe, is Father, **Son**, and Holy Spirit. To get to know Jesus is to get to know God – Father, Son and Spirit. To have a personal relationship with Jesus is to have a personal relationship with God – Father, Son and Spirit.

Jesus reveals God to us. None of us has ever seen “God.” But Jesus shows us in tangible ways who God really is and what He is like. And so we might ask:

- **What is God like?** And, by observing Jesus, we have to conclude that God is love (1 John 4:16-17).
- **Who does God love?** As we look at Jesus, we have to say ... everyone. Ethnicity, age, gender, ability, education, income – nothing separates us from the love of God. He comes with compassion to the lonely, with healing to those who are sick, with friendship to those who feel outcast, with food for those who are hungry, with God's forgiveness and love to everyone.
- **How does God love?** And, as we look at Jesus, we have to say ... unconditionally. Whether a person has a "past," problems in the present, doubts, "issues," even hostility, Jesus shows us God still loves us.

Jesus also teaches us how to live. We believe God created us in His image. We believe He created us to live wisely and well. He gives lots of good instructions for living well, but it is so much easier to see the principles lived out. He *"understands our weakness, for he faced the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). In Jesus we see someone living out who we are created to be and how life is to be lived.

Ultimately God, in Jesus, takes all our sinfulness, all our evil, all our failure and sin ... and dies on the cross. He pays the price we deserve to die. He ransoms us so that we can have new life with God – this moment and forever. *"Because God's children are human beings – made of flesh and blood,"* the writer of Hebrews says, *"Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying"* (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus – God the Son – coming among us was not an accident. God did not fail and settle for second best. His death was the perfect culmination of His perfect life. God, in Jesus, took our sin from us.

Paul goes on to say, *"Therefore God exalted him (Jesus) to the highest place and has given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11)

The message of the church is about Jesus – God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – coming among us, introducing God to us, showing us how to live, saving us and restoring our relationship to God, today and for eternity.

So, the church is really all about a Person, Jesus, and new beginnings. Your sins can be forgiven. You can be saved. That same resurrection and new life that Jesus experienced can be ours as well. This new life in Jesus is both a new quality of life, here and now (living, forgiven and free, in God's forgiveness and the power of the Spirit), and a new quantity of life, hereafter (confident of the hope of resurrection and eternity with Christ). This is God's gift. Done. Paid for in full. Will you accept it?

So what? What difference does it make?

Paul's letter to the Philippians is about life as His people, people who take Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and presence in their lives seriously and want to figure out how to live this out. How is Jesus relevant to life today? Paul challenges us to think about the difference Jesus – God Himself – makes in our lives (vs. 1-5).

First, he reviews what Christ has done:

- *Is there any encouragement from being united with Christ?* What has Christ done for us? He has paid the price for our sinfulness. He offers us salvation and eternal life. We can begin again. Is that encouraging? You bet.
- *Is there any comfort from His love?* His love means that each of us can come to Him as we are and be forgiven. We do not have to be good enough for Christ to love us. He loves us where we are. And loves us too much to leave us there.
- *Is there any fellowship with the Spirit?* When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, His Spirit comes in to us, sharpening our consciences, changing us from the inside out, transforming us from the inside out (Romans 12:1-2).
- *Any tenderness and compassion?* Jesus has shown us compassion, not in abstraction, but in practical ways. Jesus encourages, comforts, heals, restores. And ultimately, at the cross, Jesus shows us God's tenderness and compassion are not fuzzy feelings, they lead to real, dramatic action.

Then he makes the practical connection: *"Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (2:2-5).*

We can believe all the right things about Jesus, but that belief must translate into everyday living. Right belief has to become right living. This God – Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit – invites us to "believe" in Him. To "believe" is not just intellectual agreement with a point of doctrine. To really "believe" is to step out in faith and trust. For instance, at the edge of Lynn Canyon (a deep chasm in North Vancouver, BC), I can say I believe the narrow, wobbly suspension bridge which crosses the rocky gorge will support my weight. I can agree, intellectually, that the bridge is sound. But if I really do believe it, I will step out in faith and walk across the bridge. In the same way, if I really believe in God, I will step out in faith and trust Him.

And what does right living look like? Right living means asking the question, "*What would Jesus do?*" or, more correctly, "*What DID Jesus do?*" Right living means right loving – loving one another in concrete practical ways with same selflessness as Christ. "*I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you,*" says Jesus, "*And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends*" (John 15:12-13).

Right living means being one in spirit and purpose (2:2). What is our spirit and purpose? Our spirit and purpose is to love God and love one another (Matthew 22:37-40). Our spirit and purpose is share the good news with others and help them grow in faith (Matthew 28:18-20).

Right living means considering others better than ourselves and looking to their interests. "*A new command I give you: Love one another,*" says Jesus, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*" (John 13:34). What does that mean? It means, among other things, doing things out of love for other people that may not be our first preference. It may mean eating at McDonald's with your children or grandchildren when you hate McDonald's food yourself. But you do it out of love. It may mean watching *Pride and Prejudice* with your spouse, even though you've seen it a dozen times before. You do it out of love. It may mean realizing that some things in church may not be just what you like ... but you do it out of love.

You do these things, not to compromise anything you believe in. In fact, quite the opposite. You do these things that you may not particularly like, because you WILL NOT compromise what you believe in – and what you believe in and will not compromise is this: the unconditional love of Jesus, the spirit and purpose of Jesus, the mercy and grace of Jesus, and the model of humility set for us by Jesus.

It's a different way of looking at McDonald's isn't it? It's a different way of looking at *Pride and Prejudice*, isn't it? And it's a different way of looking at church, isn't it? It's a way of looking at life with same attitude as Christ Jesus, who made himself nothing, who took on the form of a servant, and gave himself – completely and absolutely – to you. And the promise you have is this: in the future, God will also highly exalt you.

We are God's church – Jesus' Church – the Spirit's church ...

So the church is not about **me**. The church is not about what I like or don't like. It's not even about "**us**." It's about **Jesus**. It's all about **Jesus**. As a church, yes, we do have to function as an organization and, yes, we do have to maintain our building ... but those things are for a purpose ... it's all about **Jesus** and His love.

We come to church to meet Jesus. We know Jesus/God is on a mission – to both bring everyone to know Himself, AND to care for the hurting, the broken, the suffering. That's what Jesus did. Our challenge is to discern what God – Father, Son, and Spirit – is doing in our neighbourhood, city, and world. And get in step with Him. The central question is how do we have the same mind as Jesus? May His Spirit give us wisdom.

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