

**March 13, 2022**  
**Jesus' (Messy) Church**  
**1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:1-16**

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "Upon this rock (confession of faith) **I will build my church**, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it" (Matthew 16:15-18). In the New Testament, people who believe in Jesus are **Jesus' church**. We are His church globally, united by Jesus with brothers and sisters in Cuba and Camrose, Ukraine and Yukon, Nairobi and Nanton. We are also Jesus' locally, in Lethbridge, Havana, or Kyiv.

1. Jesus' church is God's plan for His people. When we believe in Jesus, we are part of His church. Jesus' church is not somewhere we go, its who we are.
2. Jesus' church is God's plan for His world (we are God's "good news" to the world)

This week, we're thinking a bit about who we – Jesus' church – are. Jesus says, "**I will build my church.**" We are **His** church. **He** is building **His** church in and through us. What does that mean for us? What does it mean for us as we try to move forward from Covid?

***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 reason for the church – is **Jesus**. Church is all about **Jesus**. First B is not really **my** church, **your** church, or even **our** church. We are **Jesus'** church.

One of the images the New Testament uses to describe the church is as a body – the body of Christ: "*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ ... 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. 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. 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? But, in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? ... Now **you** are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it"* (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Each one of us is unique. We're not all an eye, ear, or thumb. We're not all musicians, teachers, or knitters. We're all different. We all matter. We are all interconnected. We are all "kin." We are part of something bigger than ourselves.

What part of the body do you think of yourself as?

***As the body of Christ, we are the only "Jesus" most people see***

We, Jesus' church, may be the body of Jesus, but we are FAR from a perfect image of

Jesus. People in church, you and I, sin and fail. We are messy people. So Jesus' church is messy. Unfortunately, then, some people have not-so-good experiences of church.

1. ***Sometimes the problem isn't us.*** Christian Chiakulas says, "*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.*"<sup>1</sup>

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.

2. ***Sometimes the problem is us.*** After I read this piece about Millennials (born from 1981 to 1996), I reread the Gospel of Mark, looking closely at Jesus. The real Jesus. He does take up his cross for the poor, weak, marginalized, as well as the sick, suffering, immigrants – and self-righteous (like this author?) – 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 the establishment – political and religious leaders – for lack of faith, corruption, racism, self-righteousness, lack of compassion for the poor, failing to care for outsiders, being passive about injustice, 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, I noticed Jesus – the real Jesus – is much more than someone who "*challenges the establishment and pays the ultimate price.*"

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

Jesus calls ***all*** people to repentance, forgiveness, and faith in God. No one is righteous enough. Not one. All of us have to come humbly to Jesus. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) in the Bible do. Do we?

Jesus spends time with messy people. He cares for them, feeds them, heals them, teaches them, forgives them, encourages them. He loves them. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) do. Do we?

Jesus models a new approach to life and leadership: God-centered, people-centered servant leadership, genuine integrity, mercy, grace – love. He cares for people, not power or politics. This is what Jesus and the church in the Bible do. Do we?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-chiakulas/churches-millennials-if-they-just-did-this\\_b\\_8215846.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-chiakulas/churches-millennials-if-they-just-did-this_b_8215846.html)

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

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

Jesus doesn't just "pay the ultimate price" for His convictions and actions. He dies, out of love, to pay the price for our sins, to give us all life, hope, peace, joy, and love. Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) give up their own lives and rights for others. This is what Jesus and the church (the body of Christ) do. Do we?

If we are the body of Christ (and we are) – if we are the Jesus people see (and we are) – are we being the body of Jesus? Do we do what Jesus would do if He were here now?

### ***Growing Up***

To the church in Ephesus, Paul also writes about being the body of Christ: *"I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one **body** and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*

*"He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ ... Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the **body of Christ**. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

*"Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We won't be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of **his body, the church**. He makes the whole **body** fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so the **whole body** is healthy and growing and full of love."* (Ephesians 4:1-16).

**We can be "immature like children."** Paul says this happen when we're tossed about by "every wind of new teaching." When we're blown about by "people who try to trick us

*with lies so clever they sound like the truth.”* What does that look like in 2022?

***Growing in maturity centres us on Jesus.*** We want to know Jesus. We want other people to know Jesus. We want to be the body of Jesus. We want to see Jesus' love, justice, and grace become real in our angry, hurting world. We *"grow in every way more and more like Christ ... Each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the **whole body** is healthy and growing and full of love."*

***Growing in maturity centres us on Jesus' mission:*** Paul lists (a very few) key doctrines around which we unite: *"one body (the church), one Spirit, one hope for the future, one Lord (Jesus), one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of al."* Then he tells us to get on with being the people of Jesus. Put aside other issues and agendas (there're lots we could choose from) and simply live for Jesus. *"Lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."* (Ephesians 4:1-6).

***Growing in maturity means we speak the truth in love.***

1. First, we hear Jesus speak His truth in love **to us**. The **truth** is: **I** need a relationship with God but have sinned and fall short of His glory. The **love** is: as **I** confess my sins, He is faithful and just to forgive **me**. That's true for each of us.
2. Then, we speak this truth about Jesus, in love, with **everyone**. The **truth** is: **everyone** (including us) needs a relationship with God but has sinned and falls short (including us). The **love** is: as **we** all confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. We hold this message of new life in tension with Jesus' passionate concern to make love practical: hope, forgiveness, mercy, food, healing, joy, encouragement, restored relationships, laughter, peace, and compassion.

In 2022, we are the body of Jesus. We are the only Jesus our world will ever see. Do people see us as the body of Jesus? The churches in Cuba and Ukraine/Europe are showing us how to do this. They are sharing God's truth in tough times. They are sharing God's love in hard places. How do we do it? We try to be people of good news, people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Within the body, each one of us is unique. We all matter. We are all interconnected. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. Are we perfect yet? Absolutely not. We are all messy. But we model honest humility, confession, and repentance. And we press on.

How can I be more like Jesus? How can I be a person who models Jesus' love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?