

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

MARK 6:30-34 & 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Bible Reflection

What is the Church?

Who needs the church? Well, the answer is: if you're a child of God, you need the church. I need the church. We all need the church. And when we say the word "church," some people have this deep sense of joy and delight. Some people have this sense of, "Who needs the church?" Some people have a sense of confusion . . . "What is the church?"

Many people today feel, even many believers feel, "I don't need the church." But we need to remember that the Church was not man's idea; it is not man's institution. It is God's idea; it is God's plan.

The Church has something of an identity crisis today. "Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Open the doors...Where are all the people?" The church was a building. It's a place you go to. Well, we have buildings that we call churches, but the Church is not somewhere you go. The Church is not just an organization. It's not just an institution. It is not just a place. It's not just somewhere you go. It's something we are.

Now the book of Ephesians has a lot to say about the Church. It's kind of a theological text on the Church, and it lifts up the glory and the wonder of the Church as God ordained it.

It is God's plan to have His body, the body of Christ, be a Church. It was God's plan from the beginning of the ages, and it is crucial to God's redemption purpose on this earth. The Church is the core, it is central to what God is doing in making all things new in this earth.

The Church is a family: Ephesians 2:19 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. The household of God, the family of God."

God says in 2 Corinthians 6:18, "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord almighty". Do you know what that means? If He's our father, we are His sons and daughters. What does that make us to each other? Brothers and sisters. We're blood-related through the blood of Christ shed on our behalf. We're related to one another.

So the church is a place of family relationships, like it or not. You may not like some of the people in the church. Some of the people in the church may not like you, but we are family. We must learn to like each other, to love each other, to have a good relationship with each other. We're going to spend eternity with each other as a family.

We are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for a family. The Bible says, we are put together, joined together, built together, members

together and held together. There can be problems in families, but families can also be the place of the most intimate relationships. To be a part of the Church means that we belong to each other, that we're related to each other. We're a family. In God's family you are connected to every other believer, and we will belong to each other for eternity. We discover our role in life through our relationship with others.

In our reading from Ephesians today we read that the Church is a body, not a building, an organism, not an organization. Not as in a place you go, but as in God is making us into a building or a temple for God. God's building a house for Himself, and we are the pieces; we are the parts; we are the stones, the living stones.

And who is the foundation stone? Christ Jesus Himself. God is making us a dwelling place, a sanctuary for God. We are being fit together and joined together with Christ to be a place fit for God to live in.

God has made the church the core of change for this world. God has a plan for us and for this world. We, as a congregation, are the body of Christ. With God as our head, we are His body. Each and every one of us are members of His body. When we bless others, we bless the body of Christ. However, when you hurt another, you also hurt the Lord. For we are all a part of God, and the children of God by His blood, which He shed for all of us on the cross.

During this Pandemic and over the past 16 months, we have learned so much about what it means to be a church and how many ways there are to be a church without gathering in person or making full use of our church buildings.

Christians are supposed to go to church. Just like – Surgeons are supposed to go to the Operating Room and teachers are supposed to go to the classroom.

Every Sunday, Christians gather together to worship God and spend time in fellowship. But do we actually know why we do this? Do we pause to consider the purpose of the local church? Today people have many strange ideas of what the church is, and what it should be.

The Church is a living organism that has life. The Church is involved in a continuous process of transformation so that we can reach the full nature of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5 says it was the Church in particular that Christ loved and gave Himself up for her. He even nourishes and cherishes the Church. His highest affection and attention is poured into the Church. Some of you might be sceptical - - cynical -- critical about the Church because of past experiences or because of how someone in some church treated you, but we know that is not the attitude of Christ. I am sorry if you have been hurt by someone in the church.

It was while we were enemies and yet sinners that Christ died for us, His Church. He knows the Church is not perfect, but that doesn't cause Him to abandon the Church. It causes Him to commit Himself to help the Church be all that it is intended to be.

Some churches are driven by a lot of things other than their biblical purpose --

- PAST -- tradition, no change, we've always done it this way
- PERSONALITY – The Minister or other influential people that dominate
- POCKETS -- money, payments, finances, heated budget meetings
- POLITICS -- or social agendas, are these the church's focus?
- PEWS – (or chairs!) whatever they can do to fill the seats
- PAGANS -- what do unbelievers want church to be like? Let's survey them
- PROGRAMMES -- fad-driven church, latest and greatest

According to one survey, when asked, "why does the church exist?", 89% of churchgoers said, "The church's purpose is to take care of my family's and my needs." Only 11% said, "The purpose of the church is to win the world for Jesus Christ".

Does a community function just to meet together, or does it function to serve one another, to put one another first? If a community is based solely on seeing one another weekly, that's more of a social group than a community. There's an opportunity, and an invitation, for growth into a more dynamic, loving group of people who – Share one another's burdens - Financially and Emotionally. Who are willing to disrupt their own routines and make sacrifices to prioritize the health of someone else. Who will fight for one another in both the short and long term.

COVID-19 has reminded us that we all depend on each other. In the face of this, churches can mobilize to meet both the physical and emotional needs of their members and their communities, as well as to practice the perspective of putting the most marginalized, vulnerable people at the centre of decision-making.

This pandemic will reveal who we are. Prayerfully it will reveal that we are Love because GOD IS LOVE. The Church must be about Love and Service. The church is the place where the Holy God meets with sinners washed in the Blood of Jesus. The Church is called the HOUSEHOLD OF GOD - THE HOME OF GOD - THE FAMILY OF GOD - comprising all fellow citizens of the heavenly Kingdom of God. Thank God for 'The Church.' Amen.

God bless you.

Frank