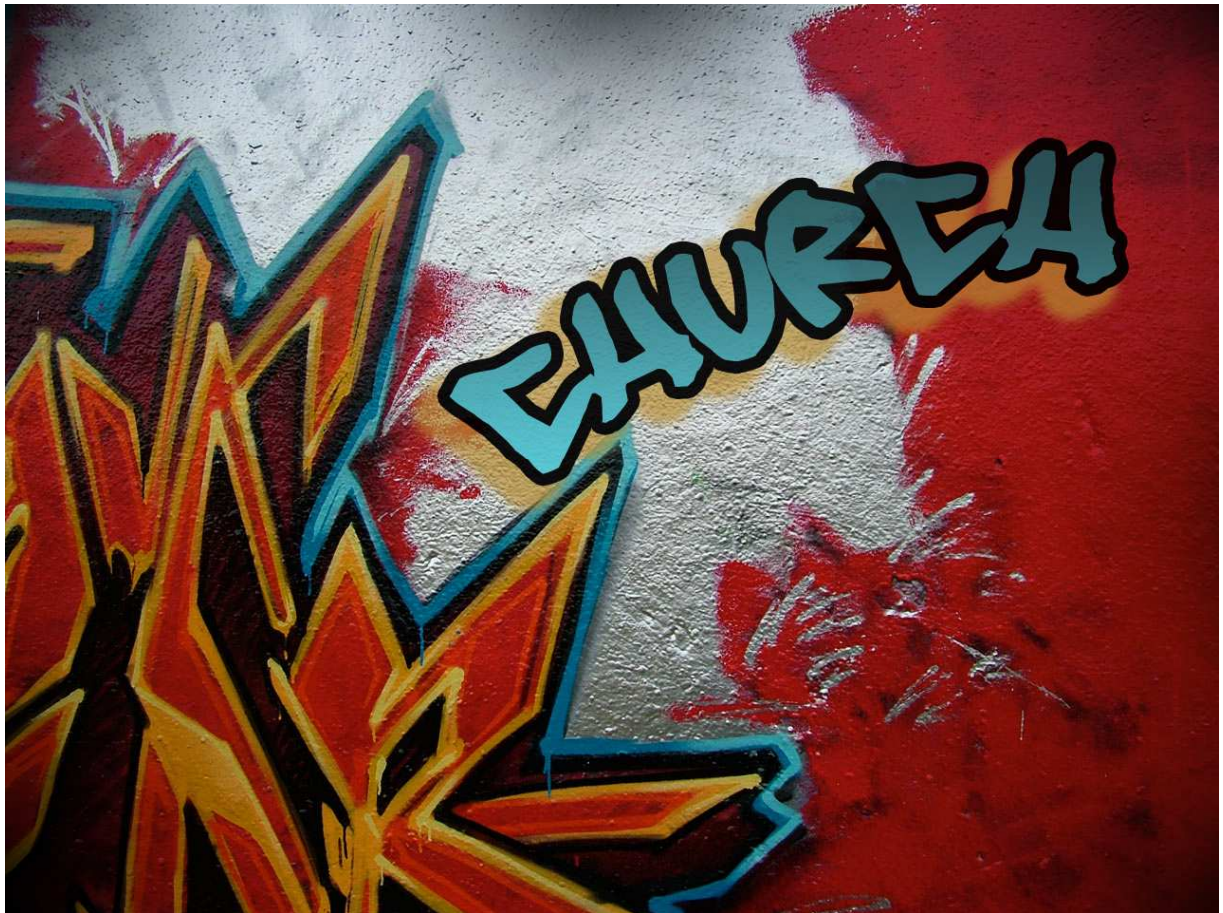


Graffiti



The words that define our faith have the potential to embody the beauty and mystery of our faith. But all too often, they instead become boundary markers, marking who is welcome and who is not. In this series, we seek to recover the beauty of these words, and through them, the beauty and power of the faith into which God has invited us.

Church as Assembly

Church is one of those words that has about a billion definitions. As soon as I say it, you get a certain definition in your mind. It might be a collection of words, or some pictures, people you've known, even emotions (positive, negative or both). **::interact with Twitter/Texting feedback::**

Would it be safe to say that almost all of us in the room today think that THIS is Church? That when we think of Church, we think of something like this - the building and this space where we gather to worship?

What if I told you that we're all wrong? That THIS is not Church, or rather that this is only one part of what the Church really is. I want to look at how the Scriptures talk about what we do here, and how that might change what we do when we come together for the better.

****a note to non-Christians****

With that in mind, I want to take us first to a town called Caesarea Philippi. Jesus is talking with his followers, and he asks them for the buzz - what people are saying about his ministry. They tell him essentially that people think he's one of the prophets. Then Jesus asks what they think - who they think he is. Peter speaks up, announcing for the first time in the Gospels, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

In response, Jesus makes a fascinating statement. He says,

"I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." -- Matthew 16:18.

Jesus says that he will use this group of followers, this huddle of people who all recognize that he is God's chosen one and in fact IS God, to "build his Church". The word Matthew used here for 'church' is *ekklesia* (*ekklhsia*). Literally, it means 'called out' and in Jesus' world, it basically meant 'assembly'. An *ekklesia* was any group of people who came out of their private homes and came together in a public space, regularly, for some common goal.

::slide:: Assembly (*ekklesia*): Any group of people who meet regularly to pursue a common goal.

In the ancient world, an *ekklesia* could be a city council meeting. Or maybe a group that met to read Homer to each other. Sports fanatics could be considered an *ekklesia*. What is *not* considered an *ekklesia* is the building where these groups met.

And that's interesting, because Jesus could've chosen any number of words to describe what he was doing. He could've said, "On this rock, I will build my House." Or my kingdom. Or my army. Or my nation or government. Or my people. Or my taco stand.

But he didn't. He chose to say, "On this rock, I will build my ASSEMBLY. My *ekklesia*." For Jesus, the Church isn't a building. It's not a place we go. It's who we are. Jesus calls us out of our own private lives and into this space where we come together. Church is what happens when people who follow Jesus get together to do what Jesus does.

::center screen:: picture of an ancient Temple

That's a pretty big paradigm shift for us - the idea that Church isn't some place we go, but it's something we either choose to be or not be. It was just as hard for the ancient peoples to wrap their brains around it. For an ancient person, gods lived in Temples, and if you wanted to interact with that god, you went to the temple and worshiped.

Jesus changed all that though... listen to what Paul told the Corinthians about Temples:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" -- 1 Corinthians 6:19

The fun of this verse is that the word 'your' is plural, but 'body' is singular. This doesn't mean that MY body and YOUR body are all temples. It means that when we come together, when we are *ekklesia*, we become the Temple of God, the place where God lives.

I'd like to introduce a couple of word pictures to help us out.

<PTO example> :: center screen :: **picture of a gymnasium set up for PTO meeting, then for a HS basketball game, then a dinner table, then back to the gymnasium PTO meeting**

PTO in gym

PTO in auditorium then at BBall game

PTO Dinner

The Church is like the PTO meeting. What happens there is vital, essential to the mission of the team or organization, but the true mission cannot be accomplished *only* in the huddle/meeting.

Rather, what happens in the assembly, what happens in the *ekklesia* is meant to spill over into the outside reality. Into the football game, or into the schools. Outside the doors of our building.

Church as Body

Paul didn't talk about team sports and they didn't have public schools, so he used the metaphor of our own bodies to talk about Church. Listen to how he describes our gathering together:

::Center screen:: - a good visual representation of a body

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is,

there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you. -- 1 Corinthians 12:12-21

The implications of this metaphor are profound. How often have you "come to church" and just sat back and watched? Have you ever felt useless or inferior - maybe that you don't know enough or aren't spiritual enough or have too many skeletons in your closet for you to actually do anything important? Or maybe you've looked at what someone else does and said, "I could never do that, so I don't really matter." Or maybe you've felt that you're just not really that essential, that if you don't come, if you don't gather with the *ekklesia* no one will really miss you.

According to Paul, that's not true. Sure we're all different. Sure we have different roles to play. But we're all part of one body. And if you don't come, if you don't gather, if you don't BE church with us, then we're crippled. We're disfigured. We *need* you. *I* need you.

Can we live without a full body? Of course we can. But our lives are not full. We recognize that we are missing something. So too with the Church. Will Beaver Creek Nazarene survive with you or me? Of course. But to be full, to be the *ekklesia* God calls us and intends us to be, we need you.

Communion

So what are the implications of understanding Church as *ekklesia*, as an assembly?

Most important is this: Church is not what happens in here. Gathering for corporate worship is only a part of what Church is. Because WE are the Church, because God's Temple is anywhere two or more believers gather, we have the opportunity to be God's body at work in the world. We can choose to be God's representatives to everyone around us. In another letter, Paul calls us God's ambassadors.

What we do here is really the huddle. We gather and we worship, we remind ourselves of God's story, God's gameplan, God's desires for us. And when we break from here, we go back to the frontlines, back to the game, back into the thick of it. We go to BE the Church in our homes and at our jobs, in our schools and when we're hanging out with our friends. THAT's where Church happens, that's where we have the opportunity to be God's ambassadors, Jesus' body.

We might even go so far as to say that the Church that happens in here is a reflection of the Church that happens out there. If all you ever do is huddle, you're going to lose the football game. If your PTO meetings are all talk and no action, the schools will be disastrous. If you only eat one meal a week, you'll be a very unhealthy person.

It's the same with Church. If you only BE Church, if you only gather with your *ekklesia* once a week (or less!) you will not be very good at it. You'll feel useless, you'll feel inadequate. The good news is that you don't have to wait for Sunday to be Church. You can gather with brothers and sisters as easily as sharing a meal or a cup of coffee. Take your kids to a park together or go to the mall after school.

Every moment you spend with another Christian is a chance for you to BE church. To embody Jesus' life and mission to the world around you.

a note to non-Christians here

Communion Set-up

It's only appropriate that we end our time together by celebrating communion. We aren't just any *ekklesia*. We're different from a PTO or Football team because Jesus builds our *ekklesia*. We belong first and foremost to HIM. And we're to be about his business, on his mission. On the night he was arrested and executed, Jesus gathered his followers around a table and shared a meal with them. And during that meal, he took bread and broke it. He passed it to his followers and said, "This bread is my body, which is broken for you. When you eat it, remember me."

Then he took a cup filled with wine and passed it around the table. He told them, "This cup is your new covenant with God, made by my blood. Every time you drink it, remember me."

Every time we celebrate communion together, we remember that Jesus gave himself up for us and for the world. If we are to be his body, and if we are to share in his work and mission, then we are to imitate his love and sacrifice. That's what we remember as we share in this bread and juice.

Explain Intinction

Let's pray together.

Please come, share in Jesus' death and resurrection as the Temple, the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building here in Beavercreek, OH.