

# 3 November Sermon Summary 2019

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## Core Beliefs 4. The Church

Today a record number of people say they believe in God but they do not believe in the church. People are leaving the church, but they are not necessarily leaving God. The news about the church is dominated by the negative. Sexual abuse scandals by the institutional church. Women being put down in leadership and told to stay in abusive relationships. Pastoral abuse where pastors use their authority in harmful ways in people's lives. Pastors who abuse the Bible to collect more money for their jet planes. People often say now, "Jesus is attractive but we do not want anything to do with the church."

I have seen colleagues in ministry drop out disillusioned by the church. People being bullies, people gossiping, people abusing power. Some of these have been in pastoral ministry for decades and leave worn down and disillusioned by the church. Today I want to talk about core belief 4. We believe in the church. As one of the seven core beliefs about Christianity. We believe in God, people Jesus.

I just want to say despite all the negative things I have seen in church over 27 years, I believe in the church. I absolutely, passionately believe in the church. Recently someone came to me. New to this church. Just been diagnosed with very serious illness. I asked who they knew. Named two people I knew a little. I suggested two other people who I knew had walked the same journey. The person didn't want to ask them directly or be a bother. With their permission, I made 4 phone calls. Every person said, "Yes, absolutely I will be part of the support team for this person. No hesitation. They have already been at work. Folks that is the church at its very best. Surrounding someone who is hurting with love. I believe in the church."

**We believe the Church** is the people of God, inseparable from Christ, the context for worship, fellowship, ministry, mission.

What do we mean when we use the church? We say "I am going to church." is a place. Church is not a place, or a building. If this building burnt down, ICBC still exists as a church. I am going to a meeting of the church at Deveron St is accurate but clumsy. People say, "I wish the church would do this." What they mean is the staff or me should do this. The church has become an organization that serves my needs. So if the church is not doing something, they feel free to say, "The church ought to do this." They do not equate themselves as the church. The church is an organization designed to serve their needs. If it is not meeting their needs, they feel free to complain or to say, "Well, I will go somewhere else." However, the church in essence is not an organization. It is a community of people. By necessity, it has organization. Any group has to have organization. The nature of the society we live in means we have to have health and safety policies, sexual abuse policies, finance policies etc but the organization is not the church.

**We believe the church is the people of God.** Invisible church - all believers from all time, Universal church - all believers in world at present, Local group of believers— most common usage of word such as us here or Church within the church - not everyone who meets with Christians is a Christian.

Many words used to describe the church. Most common is people of God. OT Ex 6:7 NT ecclesia in Greek. It is the central theme of OT and at the close of NT the home of God is with his people. God himself will be with them. Rev 21:3 The meaning is a living community who have responded to the call of God, not a building, structures, organization.

**Body of Christ.** This stresses our connection with Christ, and our interconnectedness. Many images going on here. Body of Christ his hands and feet here on earth. Jesus is not physically on earth. We are his physical agents here on an earth that God works through. If someone is hungry, Jesus works through a person to bring them food. If someone needs comfort, Jesus works through a person to bring him or her comfort. If someone needs to hear about God, Jesus works through a person to bring him or her the message. We are the physical presence of God on earth, physically represent Christ to people. Christ is the head of the church. Head is not an authoritarian word like CEO. Head means the source. Head of a river. The church comes out of Christ. Body imagery also picks up interconnectedness. Many parts to do different roles but still a whole. Arm is nothing unless connected to a body.

**Bride of Christ** This stresses the loving, exclusive relationship between God and us. For men, this idea of being a bride is a bit weird but it is not literal, but imagery. Imagery of bride picks up two key thoughts. One is the exclusivity. We cannot have a relationship with Christ and with something or someone else at the same level. Christ is our no one relationship. He rightly gets upset if we try to share that place with others. The bride metaphor also stresses an intimacy. Our spouses see the real you, and loves you anyway. God is not put off by your brokenness and my brokenness. And he is not put off by the brokenness in the church. He keeps on loving and believing and investing in the church. God does not walk away for his church.

**Building Temple of God** OT imagery. People of God could come into the temple. Outer court. Very centre of the temple was the holy of holies. This was where the presence of God was. Only the priest could go in there. Paul says, "You (plural) are the temple of God. That is when we come together; the presence of God is here."

**Kingdom of God** not the same as the church. However, it does remind us of the servant nature of the church. Kingdom is the rule of God. However, church serves whether it finds itself. Service is the key currency in the church.

**Family of God.** This image picks up our interconnectedness with each other. If I am a child of God, then I am in the family of God. Others are my brothers and sisters. We do not get to choose our brothers and sisters. However, we cannot divorce ourselves from them either. They are family. We are in relationship with them regardless of whether we like them or not. Parents link family to each other. God is the one who links us to each other's.

**Flock of God.** Shepherd imagery. God's provision, guidance, and protection of his people our dependence on him. Voice

**Vineyard of God.** Our dependence on God to provide nutrients to grow. In addition, our purpose is to bear fruit.

All images that help us to understand what it means to be living community who have responded to the call of God but none are complete in themselves.

### **Is inseparable from Christ**

Coming to Christ means we join the body of Christ. It is impossible to say “I want to come to Christ but I do not want anything to do with church.” One cannot separate the two. If you could, Christ would have more than one body as it were. We cannot come to Christ on our terms. The very essence of the Godhead is that of community. Therefore, as we come to Christ, we come to community. When you come to Christ, you become sons and daughters of God. That means you join the family of God. The Bible never ever speaks of a solitary religion. The covenants with Noah and Abraham, while made to them individually have always been to form a community.

### **We believe the church is the context of worship, fellowship, ministry and mission**

**Worship.** No other religion has the belief that God is present when they gather. We do not worship a memory, but celebrate his presence with us. Praise, thanksgiving and prayer can be individually done, but often is in the context of other believers. As we read the NT it is in community that they baptized others, had communion, met for prayer, worshipped together with songs.

**Fellowship.** It is hard to have fellowship with yourself. “Koinonia” fellowship means sharing together. Fellowship today is used to mean getting together but it is far deeper than that. It is sharing our lives with one another. It is prayer, encouragement, sharing, possessions, love and care. There is a huge hunger today to rediscover true community.

**Ministry.** Jesus said that greatness was found in service. Service not a pathway to greatness. Service is greatness. Ministry happens in the context of the church. The gifts of the Spirit. Everyone given a gift to build up the church. Not just special people who had special experience but all believers are equipped by Spirit of God for ministry. No ministers as such. Minister is someone who serves thus we are all ministers. Within that, some are called to leadership role within the church. We also minister to the wider community. Jesus ministered to all those in need, and we are to do the same. In your workplace, you are to serve as if serving Christ, bringing salt and light. We are called to minister to the poor and oppressed because this is the heart of God.

**Mission** We are to share the good news of what God has done. Again, context is the church. The Bible does not have lone rangers going out on their own, but as a people, we have a primary task of sharing what God has done. We together make disciples of all people. We help bring in the kingdom of God, rule of God over every part of this world.

Some have used this to define church (ministry in this model is both part of mission and fellowship. Mission outward Worship upward Fellowship inward Triangle. So to be a church all 3 elements must be present regularly.

Our practise suggests we no longer believe in the church. That is, the church as a community is no longer of core importance. Why do I say this? We do not come regularly. We put sport, and leisure above meeting as community. We do not value this community. It is a struggle to get us together as a community to pray, to worship, to celebrate, even just to have fun. We put low value on community. We do not believe that to be united with Christ is to be united to a community of believers. But if it is not a core belief, maybe you do not have Christianity. God, Bible, and the church throughout history have affirmed this as core belief.

Some maybe look at church, in it's local expression and have been wounded by it. Seems barely recognizable from what you read in the Bible. Even the NT church deeply flawed in practise. Must not idolize NT church. However, God has not given up on the church. In all its various forms. High swinging version, deeply reflective versions, social action version, divided, narrow-minded version. Traditional versions God is at work in all of them. We are called to work alongside him building a community that reflects him. However hard, demoralizing that can seem to be at times. Christ loves the church despite its flaws, just as he loves you, flawed as you are. Church that we can see as deeply flawed, that we look at with judgemental critical eyes, is no more flawed than you. You are not better than the church. God pours out his love on you and his people.

I challenge you to reconsider your core beliefs. Search the Word afresh. Search hearts afresh. Say, what do I really believe? Do my actions line up with this. If this was a core belief Meeting together would be priority Be on time. Expectancy as we meet Praying together would be priority AGM would be packed. Small groups of service, fellowship, mission all over the place. We would never say The church ought to.... But say I need to... We would be very careful of how spoke about the church. If someone comes up to Ros and starts to run down me, Ros is naturally going to get upset. Now it might even be that what they say is true. Ros knows me as well as anyone and knows there is some truth to what they are saying. She has seen me at my worst. But she is still going to get upset. Why. Because she loves me. She sees the best in me.

Christ loves the church. Deeply loves the church. Flawed though she is. He is God. He knows it's faults. But he deeply loves her. So he gets upset if we start to run it down. He died for the church. So be very careful before you start running down the church. Do we believe in the church?

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

- # When have you seen the church at it's best? When have you see it at it's worst? What impact have these times had on you?
- # Discuss the idea that the church is inseparable from Christ. Why do so many separate them today?
- # Which word picture of the church do you most identify with? Why? Which do you least identify with?
- # In what way is God present when we meet? Do we believe that as we gather he is present? How can we better become aware of his presence when we gather?
- # How could mission be something that everyone in the church contributed to?
- # Discuss how the church would be different if “church” were a core belief for us all? What factors are fighting against “church” as a core belief?