

Why Church?

Pondering Questions: Part 1 “Why Church?”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 21, 2022

11th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Acts 2:43-47; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 18:15-20

Reflection: Psalm 10

Greeting: The Lord gives wisdom, from him comes understanding. The Lord stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He guards the path of justice and preserves the faithful. Let your wisdom enter our hearts and minds, O Lord! (*Proverbs 2*)

Prayer: O God, keeper of wisdom and understanding, you have brought us together into your presence this day. Grant us grace to worship you as we seek your blessing and your knowledge. Help us to grow in heart and mind with you, Lord. Build us up in your spirit so that we may know your love and be strengthened by your righteousness. Help us to be bold in our faith so that we may do your will joyfully and eagerly. May we worship you in a spirit of truth, that we may follow you all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 10

*Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God and say in their hearts, “You will not call us to account”? But you do see! Indeed, you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; seek out their wickedness until you find none. The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations shall perish from his land. O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.
(Psalm 10:12-18 NRSVue*)*

We read the words of Psalm 10 and hear of God’s love and care. That the Lord provides for those who are in need. That the grieving and the helpless find hope. That God hears our prayers and does not turn away from our troubles. Do you trust in the Lord when you are in need? How do you share God’s love with others when they are struggling? How can we come together to seek justice for all people? How can we celebrate God’s love as a community?

Prayer: O God, you are our hope and our praise. Help us to seek your wisdom in all that we are and do. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Acts chapter 2 verses 43 through 47.

Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 12 verses 1 through 8.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:1-8 NRSVue)*

Our final reading for today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 through 20.

[Jesus said] "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done

for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:15-20 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today Today we begin a new series. And this series is going to be based on questions, more specifically your questions. Some of them are questions that I have received in the past while some are questions that I'm getting just now. Today's question is culmination of multiple questions I've been asked at various times: Why church? And a part of the question is really a question of “if I can be spiritual on my own, why would I need church?” And you may think it's an odd question for me to be answering if you are all here as part of the church. But knowing how to answer this question helps when people outside of the church ask it. And so, I found this question to be an intriguing one because it's not a question that we always think of, and it may not be a question that we have a ready answer for. For some of us, church is just church, and it's always been there and always will be there. But being able to vocalize exactly why being part of the church matters is important. And so, when I was reflecting on this question, I thought of a few different readings that would help to demonstrate the two things that I think of the most when I think about what the church offers that we can't have on our own. Because really, that's the key to being able to answer this question. Because there's lots of things that church is good for, and lots of things that church gives us. Some people can try to do those things on their own, but I think that the two that stand out for me are community and accountability. The problem we run into is that those are two things that don't happen when you go it alone.

And so, I picked a few readings that helped to show the importance of community and accountability. And we began with Acts. In Acts we see the early church where all the believers come together and share everything in common. They sell possessions and goods and give it to whoever has a need. And they spend time together, both at the temple and at home, eating together, praising God, and spending that time with each other. And I think that's part of the introduction to the idea of the community that church offers. That example here in Acts really sets the stage for us because it talks about the way that these people spend their time together, both in the temple and at home. That it's not just that they meet once a week, it's that they make the other people part of their lives. And that idea of community begins to build because it means not just people but a support network and not just once a week, but as an ongoing relationship.

Then we come to Romans where we hear Paul talking about how each part of the church, each member has a different function. Part of the beauty of this example is that we can let it play out in so many different ways. Because whereas Paul gives examples of prophecy, ministry, and teaching, we can fill this with any role that we can think of. Another way that we build community in the church is when we do realize that each person has a different role and a different strength that they offer. It means that together, each of us is doing what we are best

at. And as a group, we are stronger because of that. Because it means that you don't have to be the best at all of those things. You don't have to be preacher, teacher, leader, cook, helper, supporter, prayer, encourager, custodian, and organizer. That when we think about all the different roles, and I could go on forever thinking of different things that people offer, we see that people can help in different ways and that sometimes we have different strengths at different times. But we always offer them together because when we join together not only do we come together in our strengths, but we strengthen each other in those bonds. And we grow together because of it, and we all become stronger because of what we share in Christ. It's important that we understand that because that's part of the community that we need. It makes our lives easier in many ways because we're not trying to be everything at once. It allows us to focus so that we can do more together than we could apart. And it also means that when we struggle there is a community there to support us. And that is so important for us to be able to have. Because when we do find a time where we are struggling, having people there helps. But here's the other thing. Part of that community is having people there that will notice when there's something wrong.

That also leads into that second part of this question, and it is accountability. And that may not be one that you often think of when you think about "why church?" But it's something that I think people may avoid because it means not just holding others accountable, but it means being held responsible by those other people as well. And we see that in our gospel reading today. That if somebody does something then you have to talk to them about it. Speak to them alone, and if that doesn't work, bring someone else and engage the community for accountability. That way it is known that you've tried your best. If that doesn't work, involve the community as a whole to try to help with whatever is wrong. Jesus gives us a method for accountability where we hold each other accountable in love so that we can care for each other. Jesus goes on to strengthen the idea of community saying that when two or more are gathered, he is there. That when we can agree on things together, whatever we ask will be given. The reason accountability is so important is because it means that we're not just seeing each other but we're responsible to each other. And one of the ways that I see this all the time is when somebody isn't at church. And it's not a judgment thing. I don't remember the last time I had somebody speak up negatively about someone who wasn't at church. No, what I always find is concern. Now, I know some of you will inform me if I'm not going to see you. You let me know and I appreciate that. But I know that when we don't see each other there's questions of where somebody is. And if we know, somebody shares that information with us. And if we don't know, somebody's finding out. Now, a lot of times it's because people are off visiting family, taking a trip, or any number of reasons. And you know what? That's fine. I'm not here to tell anybody that they shouldn't do things like visit family and take care of themselves. But it does mean people want to know where you're at, and that people notice when you're gone. Being part of the community means that you're accountable to them because if you're missing, they want to know why. And that really does matter. Because it means that if you fall on hard times and you disappear, somebody's going to come around looking for you to make sure that you're

okay and to find out how you can be helped. And that's huge because we all could use that kind of love in our lives.

We place a lot of emphasis, especially in our American way of thinking, that each one of us is responsible for ourselves and ourselves only. And we can be really bad about leaning so heavily on individualism. The reason I say that is because sometimes we get so wrapped up in our individualism that we forget that we are part of a group. And I think it matters because when we are part of the church, it's not about coming together because we all think alike, and we all act alike, and we all do the same things and believe the same things. Some things yes, we share the common core of our beliefs. But the thing that drives us to be part of the church, the church that we are a part of now, is because we've been called to love one another. We are called to love each other in our differences and to grow through our shared experience. I touched on this with my theory of interpretation, and it extends into how I see the role of the church. The role of the church is to love God and to love neighbor. And we begin in that love by loving each other and taking care of each other. And when we do, it enables us to reach out and invite others to become part of that community. And we hold each other accountable because we're better because of it. We joined together as community because we are stronger because of it. We come together and worship God because it makes us all stronger in our love for God and our love for each other. That when we are held accountable, if we mess up somebody will let us know and help us to do better. When we see somebody struggling, we can offer our support. Sometimes we may be strong and sometimes we may be weak, but as the church together we will always be strengthened by God's love. When we come together as the body of Christ, we may not all have the same strengths and the same weaknesses. But when we join our strengths together in Christ our hope and our love grow exponentially. Our faith is strengthened by those around us who strengthen us in prayer and commitment, because we are together as a community accountable to one another in love and grace and mercy. And so, the next time someone asks you "why church?" I hope that this is part of your answer as well. And that it's also part of your invitation to let others know that there is community waiting for them. Always with open hearts, open doors, and open minds strengthened by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, coming together as a community in Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Pondering Questions

Our series will have Pastor Cameron answering your questions! Get them to him however is most convenient for you and he will be using those as the basis for our weekly message!

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke
Family of Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Family of Don Holsapple
Family of Loise Roberts	Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Family of Bunny Sparks	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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