

## Introduction

I spend a lot of time thinking about church. It is probably my favourite topic of conversation, I read tonnes of books about church and how church should work, if it is working, how it definitely isn't working, I love getting together with people and discussing church.

I work here at WEFC so I spend even more time thinking about how church should work, and whether it is meeting it's purpose. Many times I feel very encouraged about church, and, honestly many times I am really discouraged. Some times I feel like we don't even know why we do what we do, and then other times I am blown away by people who love Jesus or are impacted in amazing ways by what Jesus has done in their lives, and are doing incredible things in the name of Jesus.

My heart breaks for those who leave the church and seem to reject it, and the beliefs on which it stands. Or, I see young people make really bad decisions and it hurts to see them hurt. Many times I feel responsible for these things happening, so guilt enters the equation. I see young people leaving the church and not coming back, and many times I feel like we as a church, have failed them.

I even did a study recently to see how many people come to our Sunday AM services and it depressed me to see that our church has about half as many youth and young adults in it as it should. I know from my reading that this is the case all over the world in the church and I wonder, how can the church survive? Should it survive the way that it is?

So I ask myself, what is the church here for? Why do we exist? What defines a church?

I think part of the problem is that people often think that church is something that it is not...people often expect things of it that it is not meant to do...people often abuse and even persecute the church...people often hate those who are involved...people disrespect church leaders...this is what is going on inside the church...of course people are leaving...

Often times people just get bored with what we do here at "church", there is a story of a man who in the middle of a pastor's sermon, he stood up and walked

outside. After the service, the pastor approached the wife of the man who walked outside and asked her "Did I say something that offended your husband?" the wife answered "No, he's just sleepwalking."

Then I hear the same type of complaints from people who are outside the church...I won't go there, it's filled with a bunch of hypocrites...people in the church are just judgmental and rude...I like Jesus, but not the church...all they want is my money...it's stuffy there...church is boring...they are really intolerant...they only go to church because it is a crutch for weak people...

Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. ~Mahatma Gandh

"Religion to me has always been the wound, not the bandage." Dennis Potter

"To assert that the earth revolves around the sun is as erroneous as to claim that Jesus was not born of a virgin." Cardinal Bellarmine

"Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning." Bill Gates

"With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."  
Steven Weinberg

"In Heaven all the interesting people are missing." Friedrich Nietzsche

"I'm completely in favor of the separation of Church and State. My idea is that these two institutions screw us up enough on their own, so both of them together is certain death."

George Carlin

"I'm having the best day of my life, and I owe it all to not going to Church!"

Dan Castellaneta

Maybe you are sitting there and are uncomfortable with many of the things that you hear me saying...maybe you love the church the way it is...maybe you are sitting there and silently agreeing with many of these things...maybe you were

brought here by someone and you really don't like church...maybe you thought you would come and check it out for the first time...maybe you have been here all your life, and your thinking oh c'mon it's not that bad, and I would agree...definitely I have given a negative slant on the church so far...but I think we could all agree that...maybe it's a good time to figure out what church is supposed to be all about.

A perception problem for the church is not good, and it is an even bigger problem if the church doesn't know who they are. So, what is church? What are we doing? What is the point?

I wanted to see what Jesus said about the church, and I found that there really was not a lot that he said while he was on earth since the church really only came into existence after his death, but the one passage that really spoke to me was the one that was read earlier in Matt 16

### **People who know who Jesus is:**

I think this is a great passage, just as I have today, it starts with some misconceptions, this time with misconceptions about who Jesus is, "who do people say I am?" he asks and basically people are saying that Jesus is a prophet, but apparently that is not quite right...and then he asks this awesome question. Jesus asks "...who do you say I am?"...Who do you say I am? Can you imagine a moment like that...a moment, when Jesus walks up to you and says, "but who do you say I am?" How would you respond to that question? Think about it...when I think about it, I have an easier time coming up with all kinds of misconceptions that people have, the way that people misunderstand...but I have a harder time defining who Jesus is.

Peter responds, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." And this is huge, this is big...Peter was stepping out here, this was not something he had been told, and the fact that he recognized this was a huge thing for Jesus. Right away Jesus says, "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." This is a huge moment, Peter has figured it out, and in fact, what Peter has figured out forms the foundation of the church.

What defines a church? It is...**people who know who Jesus is...**

Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God

That was a packed statement to the Jewish people in those days. They were waiting very expectantly for this Christ...for the Son of God to come and save them from their captivity and make them a great nation again, free and strong...or is that strong and free?

Jesus turned out to be that Christ, but in a way that was much different than what Peter expected.

Now, if the foundation of the church is people who know who Jesus is...then what does that look like? I think we don't spend enough time figuring out who Jesus is. We spend a lot of time figuring out all the dos and don'ts of being a "Christian" when in fact what being a Christian is actually way more about who Jesus is than what I do or don't do. How do we get to know who Jesus is? We can read about him, the stories about Jesus life are so important that many of them have been told 4 times over, and yet how much of our teaching, preaching, reading and learning comes from those stories found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? We need to really understand who Jesus is.

Sometimes we also get more caught up in knowing who our pastor is, or who other Christians are, and our understanding of Christianity comes from that instead of actually examining who Jesus is and getting our understanding from there. I mean Pastor Ron is a great guy, I really like him and respect him...but (now I will insult him), he is not Jesus...we must be aware of that. I think he is trustworthy, but we can't just blindly trust him, we must examine his teachings. Our Pastors are not God and you need to be checking up on us...not just blindly accepting what we say or do...if it does not represent who Jesus is, we need to be held accountable.

I hope you don't come to the services here at WEFC because the preaching is well done (well for sure you are not doing that today!), I hope you come here because you want to know more about Jesus, and maybe the preaching helps you do that. I also hope you aren't part of WEFC because of the kids programs, I hope you are part of our church because you want your kids to know Jesus. I hope you don't come here because you enjoy the youth programs, I hope you come here because you enjoy knowing Jesus. Maybe some of these things help you to meet Jesus, but I hope you don't come here just because of those things, if that is the case then we

are just a good community club serving the community by providing entertainment and interesting learning, that is not what we desire to be.

Here is a test that can help you determine why you come to WEFC, when you leave here do you say, I really liked the music today, finally they did some songs I like, I really didn't like the music today, how can you worship when it is those songs? How you should be responding to the music is more like this, I really liked the music today, it led me to an attitude of worship before God. Or, my attitude wasn't right today, I was not able to worship.

Is your attitude one that is searching for God, or is it one that is searching for something you like? Once you answer that question, then you have the right to voice your concerns...if WEFC gets in the way of you knowing Jesus, then something is wrong, we need to know those things. If WEFC does things that you don't *like*...that's a different story, we don't want to hear it...actually not true, but that is not as important to us as whether you know Jesus or not.

I recognize that even with our best intentions we will not show up here every Sunday with the best of motivations or attitudes, and we will forgive you for that (because that might be true of us at times) but our hope is that many times you go away from here having met Jesus and learned more about who he is.

### **Transition:**

Peter set the foundation for the church just by knowing who Jesus was...so, we come to church because we want to know *who* Jesus is

but, be careful because hypocrisy comes from *just* knowing *who* Jesus is and not letting it affect your day to day life...authenticity comes from actually *knowing* Jesus, letting it affect your life. Hypocrisy is why you get people saying things like...I like Jesus but not the church...people outside the church recognize some validity in who Jesus is, and they do not see us representing it well, they see the church as hypocrites...how do we change that perception? How about by not being a hypocrites...How about by really getting to know Jesus...not just who he is, but living a life that is like his. There is a difference between know who someone is, and actually knowing them.

### **People who are in Jesus' Community:**

Let's take a look at the word Church that Jesus uses here in his conversation with Peter. Actually this is the first time that this word is used in the Bible, there was

no such thing as a church as we know it at this time. There wasn't any such thing as Christians at the time. So, how did Peter (and the rest of the disciples) know what Jesus meant by the word church. Because the word Jesus uses here is the greek word ecclesia. Ecclesia is derived from another greek word ekkaleo which means to call out. It has the same root ek as the word echo...which is an interesting picture when it comes to the church. An Ekklesia in those days was actually a town meeting...the town crier would go out and yell "ekklesia" and everyone would come to the town centre and they would have a meeting to make important decisions as it related to the politics of the day. Basically, it was a group of people who considered Caesar as their lord who got together to praise him, hear from him and make decisions related to him.

So when Jesus used the word ekklesia he meant quite a few things, that these people would have understood right away. Oh, right, you want your own community, your own group of people following you, you will have your own people who live as you want them to. You will call them to yourself.

A community of people knows each other well, they are honest with each other. A community knows the good and the bad of each other. In community we recognize the need for change...I recognize the need for you to change...and you recognize the need for me to change.

One of the reasons they called an ekklesia was to make important decisions...and what do important decisions mean...they mean change. You don't make important decisions if things can remain the same. A few weeks ago, Nicky and I had a bathroom that worked, it had bad paint, a bathtub that was chipping, tile that was not sealed and a toilet that...well we won't get into that...For a long time we just lived with this bathroom, it was fine, it worked, it did what we needed. But one day, Nicky and I had an ekklesia (she called me out and said, "Trevor we need to talk! This bathroom is horrible") and we decided to change our bathroom. That decision lead to all kinds of decisions, changes...what colour do we want the walls to be, what kind of tile do we want, what kind of accent do we want, do we want to expand the bathroom, do we want to expand it 4 inches, or 12inches, or 12 feet...do we want a low-flow toilet or a high flow one...etc etc. Believe me, ekklesia's lead to a LOT of change!

In ekklesia we must share our thoughts and opinions, we must be open to hear others thoughts and opinions and we must make wise decisions (as a church) that lead us closer to being an echo of Jesus. We must be unified in the important

things and open to many other things. We must also be willing to accept and embrace change in the way we do things...it is important for us to recognize that the way we do things does not define who we are as a church, it is important for us to recognize that the kind of building we meet in does not define us as a church, it is important for us to realize that the quality of teaching we hear does not define us as a church. What defines us as a church is that we are striving to be more like Jesus...and that might mean we have to change some of the ways we do things in order to live that better.

Being the church means living an honest and open life...not being hypocritical...striving to live what we believe...but also being honest about where we have fallen...and having mercy, grace and forgiveness for one another when we do.

### **Transition:**

Being an ekklesia means striving to represent Jesus well. We are his representatives, Ephesians calls it being Christ's body. Christ's body looks like him, it serves one another, it sacrifices for the good of the other, it puts other interests before his/her own.

**A church is people who care about others.** Check out the next statement that Jesus makes... "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it." Whenever I have thought of this verse in the past I had this picture of the devil and his demons reaching out of hell and trying to attack me. However, when you think of it...what are gates used for? Are they something that you attack with? No. Gates are used in a defensive posture. You set them up so that people you don't want to come in can't. In those days, people actually had gates around their city that they would close when another people would attack them.

So the idea is that the church is attacking hell, and the word that is translated overcome here is probably better translated as be stronger than...so basically hell can not stop the church from successfully bringing people out of hell. This is not saying that the church can go into hell and rescue people who have already passed away...this is talking about the hell that people live in...right now, and potentially in the future.

The church is Jesus' representative, calling people out of hell to Jesus. It is our responsibility to bring Jesus to those who do not have him. You might be thinking, "this is evangelism!" yes it is, but it is not just that. Pastor Mike spoke a

great sermon on some of the reasons why we do not want to share our faith with other people a few weeks back, so I want to touch on a different hell that people live in. The church is not just responsible to save people from their spiritual hell of being separated from God, but also from their physical hell.

The church is a group of people who are in the business of helping people. There are so many people who are hurting, who are experiencing “hell on earth,” and so many times we do nothing about it. We have people in this room right now who are living this out...they might be sitting beside you in a silent hell. How can we help? How can we be the church to those people? How can we rescue them from their hell? Those are the questions we should be asking...not was the service well done, did the music suit my tastes, did they do a good job, did they say all the right things from the platform...but how can I help people out of their hell on earth.

The opposite is true as well, I hope that the church is a group of people where you can feel free to be open about those personal hell's. Where you can be real about what is going on in your life and have someone there who cares deeply about that. That is church!

As a church you may also have people who call you on stuff, maybe the hell that you are putting other people through...how dare you do that. That is what tears the church apart.

Hell is being experienced all around us, and we often walk by it. Our neighbours going through a divorce, our friends who suffer with illness, the people begging on the street, the people who struggle with mental health issues, we must be responsible to bring them out of their hell. The world is such a small place these days because of technology, that we are also exposed to much of the suffering that goes on around the world as well. It can be overwhelming to think that we are responsible to help people in those situations.

Don't be overwhelmed...just be faithful. You don't have to solve all these problems, but you are responsible to care for the people around you...to be faithful to help the ones that we see, that we know, that we feel the nudge inside to do something about.

The church cares so deeply about people that we don't just give them a message that could save them from hell after they die...we also give them a message that says we care about you right now, because Jesus does.

## **Conclusion**

What is the church? How do we define it? The church is not a building, we can't go to church. The church is not singing, followed by announcements, followed by more singing, followed by a prayer, followed by more singing, followed by a guy speaking, followed by a couple more songs.

The church has almost nothing to do with those things. Some of you are sitting there thinking, aww man, I wish he would have said that we need to sing more modern songs in order to be a church, and others of you are thinking, oohhh man, I am so glad he didn't say we need to sing less hymns in order to be a church. That is because those things do not define a church at all, yet they are the things we discuss the most. We argue about what style of music to play, we complain about certain types of preaching. We are dissatisfied with the building we meet in, but these things have almost nothing to do with church.

When I think about it, I wanted this conclusion to be different, I wanted to come up with some program that would keep young people around, one that would appeal to them but I know that if I do that they may come, but not necessarily for the right reasons and what people want is not a new program, they can get that somewhere else, what they want and need is people, people who know who Jesus is, people who are authentic in striving to be like him, people who genuinely care about those around them. When young people see that, of course that will draw them to the church. What is the young people's complaint? It is not the songs we sing, it is that they don't think that anyone means the songs we sing. That's what church is, all the other stuff is not important, if we have those type of people, then we won't worry about the programs, the building, the music or the preaching, those will fall into place if necessary...we will be so focused on Jesus, and each other, that those things won't matter too much.

So, I want to challenge you today, don't go to church, don't take in a church service...I want to challenge you to be the church.