

**Be The Church – Love God
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Matthew 16**

We begin a Fall Sermon series today – and my task is to introduce the “**Be The Church**” theme, and sub-category of “Love God.”

So – a couple weeks ago, our amazing organist for the 8:30 and 9:45 services, Glenn Kinckner came into my office and said, “Don – I’m working on music for the choir folders for the first rehearsal; and I’m just checking, are you going to pick your “USUAL” opening hymn for September 10th?”

“My usual? What do you mean, my USUAL??”

“Well, you’ve chosen the same hymn for 9 of the last 10 kickoff Sundays!”

He was right. (*singing*) “From All That Dwell Below The Skies” – Alleluia, Alleluia.”

So I pulled out the new hymnal, took a quick look and said “Nope – we’re not going to sing that one!” We’ll sing a new one. So I started leafing through the hymnal to find one we had not sung - hmmm #10. We’ve never sung it before. (*singing text of hymn*). New words....same tune!!

So.....I’m predictable. This is a big day. I want the opening hymn energetic; full of life; a tune I love to sing. If you’re a guest visiting today I want you to know our worship is filled with the spirit of God: alive; vibrant; authentic; engaging; uplifting – with great music – whether traditional or contemporary. Music is one of the ways the spirit and faith of a congregation is best expressed.

One of the historic catechisms of the church starts with this question: What is the chief end of humanity? The answer: To glorify God and enjoy God forever. Giving God glory – worshiping God; praising God; thanking God – is a primary way you and I show our love for God. Worship is our first calling. So church – let us be witnesses to that love in our worship each week. SING WITH GUSTO! Sing like you mean it because I know you do.

But what else does it mean to “**Be The Church**”? We’ve got nine weeks planned to explore that question. I took a look at the bookshelves in my office, and as you might imagine, there are a few books about the church.

- Leading the Team Based Church
- The Habits of Highly Effective Churches
- Transforming the Mainline Church
- Staff Your Church for Growth
- The Church in Emerging Culture
- The Seven Day a Week Church

- Twelve Keys to an Effective Church
- 44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance
- God's Original Intent for the Church
- The Purpose Driven Church
- The Emerging Church
- The Multisite Church
- The Very Large Church
- The Once and Future Church
- And I actually have one that just says, The Church

But the fact is, all of those deal with the **organization** we call church. Is that what this sermon series is all about? What the organization is up to? What the ministry of the institution is like? I want to say yes...BUT WAY MORE!

Because truth be told – where **you and I** go; where you and I are; what you and I say; what you and I do – THAT is what the church looks like in the world. Without you and me – this church doesn't exist. The building might still be here, but this church would cease to be. You and I ARE the church that others see, particularly if we attend here.

Our "**Be the Church**" series is certainly intended to address the life, ministry, impact, effect of the institution – but unless it starts with you and me – every one of us – then it will never be truly reflected in the life of the institution. **Be The Church** is both individual and corporate – the two require a symbiosis and alignment, if either is to be believable or effective in following Jesus Christ.

Be the church – Love God. It's a great opening. But whole series is all bundled together. As we reviewed in last week's text from the letter of James, faith without works is dead. How many times have my words said one thing, but my life said another. I say I truly love God.....BUT.....

- I love God – but hate my neighbor.
- I love God – but speak poorly of others.
- I love God – but won't forgive a family member who wronged me 20 years ago.
- I love God – but I want to keep all the goodies for myself, and get more.
- I love God – but I'm waiting for someone else to get God's job done.
- I love God – but treat the earth as if it's something God owed me.
- I love God – but want someone else care about the poor.
- I love God – but don't recognize God's image in people who don't look like me, think like me, or love like me.

This series is an opportunity for us to discern how it is our love for God enables, equips and compels you and me to be the church – in here – and out there – at home, at play, in school, at work, as witnesses in this community and wherever God sends us in the world. We love God by being the church.

Years ago, someone in this congregation made it known to a staff member that she had intentionally stayed away from worship for six months. She said over the phone she had wanted to see if anyone from the church would contact her. As that story was shared with the team, one of my colleagues said, "Someone from the church? She IS the church. Someone needs to tell her you don't GO to church – you ARE the church!"

Now – I suggested that might not be the most pastoral response to offer in return – but I will never forget that experience – of someone “testing” the church – as if they stood outside its identity. If you and I have a need, a concern, an issue, it is up to us to be willing to make that known – to share the burden of making the church more the church.

Our text today includes one of only two instances where Jesus uses the word ekklesia – CHURCH. It is with Peter’s cryptic confession of Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus’ commendation of his words.

It happens in Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi – literally “Caesar’s town of Phillip’s” – Herod’s son, Philip, decided he would call it Caesar’s town, but it was his town too, Caesar’s town of Phillips. It was a melting pot of religious antiquity. The town was dotted by no fewer than 14 temples of the ancient worshippers of Baal. The great God of nature – Pan – was said to have had his birthplace in a deep cavern nearby. Prior to being renamed Caesarea Philippi – the town had been called Panias – the birthplace of the God of Nature.

Furthermore, the same cavern was held to be the source of the springs that became the Jordan River. A rich location for the ancient pious Jew.

And in the midst of Caesarea Philippi there was also a HUGE temple of white marble – built by Herod the great, in honor and worship of Caesar. It was a glistening structure to remind all who saw it of the divine Caesar. It is with this backdrop, Jesus asks His questions to the disciples – “Who do you say I am?” And here Peter calls him Messiah.

To which Jesus replies – “And so you – Peter – Petros – the Greek word for rock – upon this rock I will build my church.”

Some say this substantiates the primacy of Peter, and see this validating the apostolic succession of Peter’s leadership. Others say it is Peter’s faith that is the “rock” upon which Jesus says the church will be built. But Jesus doesn’t say anything about his faith.

I think it’s just **Peter** that will be Jesus’ church. Not a marble temple like Caesar’s. Not a collection of temples like Baal. Not even a temple like Solomon’s. That’s not what Jesus established that day. It’s Peter. Bumbling; impetuous, spontaneous Peter.

Peter the vacillating rock man; the confessor prone to denial – the prop who needs support. And indeed, Peter does become the first leader – preaches the first sermon in the book of Acts. Peter – a fisherman – a regular guy – the first of many who will confess Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

Regular folks. That’s who Jesus leaves the legacy of the faith to. You and I stand in the long line of Peters, and Marys and Marthas – who will be the living body of Christ – His representatives – His ambassadors in the world. You and I don’t GO to church – you and I ARE the church!

I heard Pastor Andy Stanley give a simple, yet very powerful illustration to his congregation of the fact that all of us are called to be the church – in any and every way imaginable. He said we should always assume there are guests in the building.

“And we want guests to know – skeptics; believers; smart people – we want them to know that we know they’re here – and we’re HAPPY about it. So church – how do things look? You know YOUR house looks best when you’re expecting guests. Do our facilities look like we’re expecting guests?”

*So today, when you’re in the restroom, and there’s water all over the counter, don’t say “I should look for someone from facilities.” Look in the mirror. This is YOUR house. **YOU’RE** from facilities!!! Get a paper towel and wipe it off.”¹*

You don’t know it, but I do that every Sunday morning. Actually, I do that multiple times, because I start drinking coffee at 5:30am on Sunday! ☺ Maybe that’s easier for me to do that because I work here. But it’s YOUR house too.

Pastor Andy said, “If you see a piece of trash on the floor, don’t walk around it.”

We have one custodian in the building on Sunday morning; do you know how many square feet there are in this building? There are guests in the building, and this isn’t the Four Seasons, with a housekeeping staff of 200.

Be the church. You and I don’t GO to church. We ARE the church.

When the bills come in the mail at your house, you don’t expect someone else to write the check for them do you? So – when the stewardship letter comes to your home, are you and I thinking – Oh yeah – I’M the church. I need to do my fair share in being church, in supporting church, in doing what I as the church feel called to do.

This congregation is already SO GOOD at what it does. I continue to hear from visitors – from guests – how warm, welcoming, inviting, inspiring – this place can be. They talk about the spirit in this place. All of what’s going on – the Café – the Thrift Shop – Mission Possible – Academy classes – Sunday School – the choir is back.

Imagine if you and I – if we **ALL** remembered – whether it’s the water on the counter – the trash in the hallway – the words we utter in public – the way we treat the people we run up against who may find out we actually go to church – that **WE** – each and every one of us – every moment of every day – just like Peter – are the church. And upon us – in us – through us – Jesus is continuing to build that church that it might witness God’s power in the world.

Friends we don’t go to church – by the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, we are His church.

May it be so. AMEN.

1. <http://northpoint.org/messages/your-church-2017> Andy Stanley sermon.