

## 1 Corinthians 12 v12-31 – The Church (part of our 5 a day)

We are looking at the last in our series called ‘5 a day’ – the things we need to grasp hold of to be a healthy church:-

- **The Father’s Love** ‘to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1 v12)
- **Jesus** - Sam preached a superb talk on this from Colossians 1 v15 ‘He is before all things and in him all things hold
- **Holy Spirit** Adrienne preached all the doctrine you ever need on the wonderful Holy Spirit in her talk – without the Holy Spirit we are only living half a life
- **The Bible** Russell spoke from Psalm 119 of not neglecting reading and meditating on the Bible but living it out because these are the words of God Himself
- Today we are looking at **church**

So what is church?

### **Powerpoint**

We can have all kinds of mixed messages about the church – what the church thinks it is saying can be misunderstood or even harmful.

Over the years I’ve heard ‘church’ described in many ways – a load of hypocrites, a bunch of bible-bashers, just a lot of do-gooders.

When the church is in the news it’s often for all the wrong reasons either to do with division or abuse or conflict.

For many who are listening to this talk in the congregation or on the podcast you have baggage about church – hurts or disappointments or abuses or fears.

Yet my Grace loves coming to church – it’s where her friends are – it’s where she gets to eat biscuits and chat to people and dance and sing songs and have stories.

I grew up in a great church – like Grace, for most of my childhood I enjoyed going to church and I recently looked back to see why – I had people who loved me, who accepted me, who encouraged me, I learnt things I couldn’t learn anywhere else, the people there were kind people who embraced me. They invited me into their homes and gave me tea and cake and spent time with me. I belonged.

And so here I am with confidence and an understanding of the gospel and a foundation of love and knowledge of God that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been to that church and the amazing people in it.

I want this to be a church where people feel they belong – even before they believe.

In v 27 of our passage it tells us 'you are the body of Christ' – so what we do must reflect Him

Church has the potential to be the most dynamic movement on earth, really it ought to be the most dangerous place there is – with the power to tear down and clear pathways for God to move because it is the place of ignition, the place where God Himself ignites us.

And regularly it is – often people come to me or I hear of people saying – wow, your church is great! And I hope they then go on to say – wow! Your God is great! – but I want more.

I believe there are 3 key reasons or callings why I believe the church is so important and why I believe so strongly in the transforming power of the church:-

1. v12 'the body is a unit' - We are not meant to be lone Christians doing our separate thing with no relationship to each other.

Imagine me coming to church and I decided to leave my ears at home or my head or my foot. I need every part and if I lose the use of one part I can usually still function but life gets harder.

In his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed that his disciples would be 'one, as we are one' (John 17 v11)

Wow! – we are called to be together in the same way as the Trinity is together. Of one heart.

How do we get that kind of unity when we are so different from each other?

I remember my friend Richard saying, after a men's curry night, that he really enjoyed coming because he got to talk to different people he wouldn't usually talk to.

I realised it's a real joy to be with people who are so different but can relate to each other no matter what our differences whether age or music or colour or nationality or even which football team we support!

The reason we can do that is because we are united by Jesus.

Ephesians 1 v22-23 tells us that Jesus is 'head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way'.

Colossians 1 v15 'He is before all things and in Him all things hold together'

My body has many parts but they're all called Mike!

I don't have 10 fingers each with a different name (Bobby, Benny, Nigel and Jeremy!) In the same way we are united by Jesus – in a sense we are all called Christ (the name Christian means 'little Christs' and it was at Antioch where they were first called Christians where the church had been scattered to, after the persecution in Acts 11 – they may have been separated from the main centre of Jerusalem but they were still called Christians, they still got their identity from Jesus, they were still a unit – part of the body of Christ)

Our unity is rooted in knowing Jesus Christ – Colossians 1 v18 'He is the head of the body, the church'

That's why we worship, that's one reason we have communion, that's why we meet to pray – because we know that Jesus is the head and we all need to face the same direction that the head is facing, then we are all going the same way, we are rowing towards the same shore.

It's amazing how many people can't row.

Me and Adrienne were sat together next to Lake Windermere watching people pay their money and get into rowing boats and then spend 20 minutes trying to get away from the moorings going around in circles.

The first call of any church is to encourage each other to look up, to be closer to God, to call everyone and encourage everyone to get into a living relationship with Jesus, because when we are, then things really happen – the adventure begins in the place of prayer and worship. We begin to row, to pull, in the same direction when our eyes are fixed on Jesus.

The 24+ prayer next weekend in the Boiler Room in the centre of Ormskirk will be a time when things are going to happen. It may be a sacrifice for some to get there but it will be worth every effort and we will face Jesus and row towards the same shore and hear what He wants to say to us and watch Him move as we draw close to Him. To pray for our friends and family members and to cry out for the Holy Spirit to move in our lives and community.

To listen to what He wants us to pray for and then draw a circle in the sand and not move from it – to be united under Christ in our prayers.

There is a book out by Mark Batterson called the Circle Maker based on a guy called Honi who was in a country where there was no rain and he draw a circle in the sand and prayed an audacious prayer – that he refused to move until God sent rain to his drought ridden community – and it began to rain.

Let's decide what we are going to pray bold and audacious and courageous prayers about and refuse to move until we see the power of God released on earth.

2. The second calling on the church is found in v 22 – every person in this room, in this church is ‘indispensable’. We need each other. We are called to be closer together than any other group of people on earth and to spur one another on to action – this is not a spectator sport.

You tube clip John Bishop (those listening on podcast go to church website and you will see the link next to the podcast sermon details)

Belonging to a team, together, is so important for football fans – a line is drawn in the sand – it defines you!

But you know - You can buy your son or daughter a football shirt and hope they’ll become a life-long supporter but secretly you want them to actually play for Liverpool – to see them walk out onto the pitch next to Stevie Gerrard – and to say ‘that’s my son’.

Well God feels the same about you. God hasn’t called us so He can put us on the subs bench never to play or get involved – I’m amazed at how many skilful players in the Premier league are sitting on the subs bench desperate to be picked – what a waste!

God says to you – get off the subs bench – you’re on!

Yet sometimes we say, I’m not really very important... (v15) ‘I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’ God says in this passage ‘That’s rubbish!’ You are important, you are crucial.

Ephesians 2 v10 we have been created to do good works prepared in advance for us to do.

I was thinking over the years of how much I have needed the church – the people who have helped me, they may have thought they weren’t doing much but they have been used by God to transform my life.

When people are not here on a Sunday morning for whatever reason we really miss each other. That’s not condemning anyone who has missed church but it’s a way of saying ‘we need you. You are valuable. You are indispensable’.

We all have a part to play.

Ephesians 4 v16 ‘From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work’

God is saying to some of us - ‘get off the subs bench – you’re on, and not only that, but you could be a game changer, you could reverse the score.

I remember people in my church I grew up in who would miss out on the sermon and would sacrifice time to teach me when I was younger about Jesus – and people here in this church who have encouraged and supported me and who turn up each week. And when I get to heaven any crowns we have will be shared and together we will cast them before the King of Kings and give all the glory to Him.

3. the third calling of the church is suggested in what God is described as doing – in v18 he ‘has arranged the parts of body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be’ v28 ‘in the church God has appointed’ – various ministries. It is the work of God **but why?**

So we can feel good and be a well-managed, cosy, smooth running, well maintained church?

The 3<sup>rd</sup> crucial call of the church is to mission – to evangelism – to share the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. Yesterday a number of men from OCF and Christchurch Aughton went to an Iron sharpens Iron conference in Manchester – the vision is to see 1 million men give their lives to Jesus.

In John chapter 17 Jesus says “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” and earlier on says “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.”

Several of us are attending the evangelism training and it is really good – inspiring – we have a sense of getting back to what it is all about. (There are still plenty of spaces for this Tuesday)

What are we as a church doing to share the message of Jesus?

What conversations are we starting?

What journeys towards Jesus are we starting in the people around us?

Do our lives cause others to wonder about their lives?

At a Senior Leaders meeting recently Dave S asked the question about the group of men he is spending time with – how do we move from meeting them to reaching them for Jesus?

As a church we must support and challenge each other in sharing the message of Jesus. We are the sent ones to our friends and families and neighbours.

My friend Richard at work was putting some equipment out for another colleague the other day and I joked with him saying ‘your reward will be in heaven’ and he laughed and said ‘they won’t let me in!’ – and we laughed together but afterwards I thought –

actually that's a real tragedy and I want him to know that he will be accepted into heaven through knowing Jesus.

A guy called Alta came into the boiler room on Friday night from the Buck I'Th Vine with a drink in his hand and began asking about what the Street Pastors is all about and I was able to share my testimony with him, I said to him: there comes a point when you say to yourself 'there must be more than this' (he said 'oh, that's deep man'!) – people want to know, people are open.

I love a statistic I heard at the conference yesterday – 75% of men in the uk they reckon are antagonistic and closed to hearing the good news of Jesus – that means that 25% are not antagonistic and are open to hearing the gospel of salvation!

The fact is that even in this room there are people who are not sure if you have given your lives to the challenge of knowing Jesus as Lord and of giving up the whole of your life to Him – you're in the stands and you've even bought a programme but your still not sure if you're a fan yet and when the church is worshipping and cheering your wondering 'who am I cheering for?' – now is a time to decide.

The Bible tells us that we have all sinned, all got it wrong, but in 1 Peter 2 v24 that Jesus 'himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (on the cross), so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.'

That's a challenge that not many are willing to accept (student and me at 6<sup>th</sup> form – laughed – pray for our young people) but that's the message. Believe in Jesus and you can know eternal life which begins now. That doesn't mean everything then gets easy but everything does get meaningful – there is a new purpose and power in your life.

While we were still sinners God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to die in our place on the cross (John 3 v16)

As we come to communion this morning we're not going to focus on the cross or on His death or on His resurrection but we're going to focus on Jesus Himself