

BACK TO THE BASICS: The Church Matthew 16:14-18; Acts 2:42-47ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests with us today, whether you are in the room or joining us online, we say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, I have the privilege of serving as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can let us know you are here in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are working our way, this summer, through a teaching series we have called, "Back to the Basics." We are taking a biblical look at foundational aspects of The Church and Christianity. Today our subject is The Church: What is it and who needs it? So, I want to invite you to take your bibles and turn with me to two places this morning. Matthew chapter 16 and Acts chapter 2.

ILLUSTRATION: U.S. Embassiesⁱⁱ

I've heard an illustration about how the Church is much like an embassy. The United States has embassies in every recognized country in the world. A U.S. embassy is a small part of America in a foreign country. An embassy does not belong to the country they are in, but from the country they are from. If you find yourself in trouble in another country, you'll want to try to get to the U.S. Embassy where you can take refuge.

The Church is God's embassy. Philippians 3:20 says, *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."* We are citizens of Heaven, we are foreigners here on the earth, and the Church is God's embassy on earth. It is to, therefore, represent Heaven. It is to

be a place for believers to take refuge. It is to be ambassadors of Christ to a dark and hurting world.

Today, I want to look to the Scriptures so that we can be informed on what The Church is to be about. And in so doing, I want to answer a couple of questions about Church. What is it? Who needs it? And what is our role in it? That will serve as our outline this morning.

Read along with me, as we begin, Matthew 16:13-18. *¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

This is the very first use of the word "church" in the New Testament. And it is our Lord, Jesus Christ, that makes use of the word. But what is Church? What does it mean? Let's begin there.

MESSAGE:

1. Church: What is It?

The word that Jesus uses here is an interesting word. It is the Greek word, "ekklesia." It is a compound word that literally translated means "the called-out ones." It carries the idea of an assembly, a gathering, of people that are set apart for a particular purpose.

Let me give you my definition of Church, a theological definition. **The Church is God's redeemed people, across all time and places, possessing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by way of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.** The church is commonly mistaken for a building, but it is not a building, it's a people. I heard a pastor say one time, "The Church is never about the steeple, it's about the people."ⁱⁱⁱ The Church is made up of the adopted family of God. If you have placed faith in Christ as Lord, you are a member of The Church.

Now, The Church exists in **two expressions**; the Church universal and the church local. When the bible speaks of the Church universal, think capital "C"

Church, it is referring to all believers everywhere, both living and those having gone to be with The Lord.^{iv} We have brothers and sisters, who have already worshipped this morning, on the other side of the globe, and are family members of ours in God's family known as the Church Universal. This is not universalism, but it is in reference to believers across all time and places.

Now, the church local is the local expression of the Church Universal. It is a group of believers that gather together to worship God, love one another, disciple one another, and be a witness to the world. The New Testament speaks often of the church local.

For example, in Galatians chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. *Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—²and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia...*" Galatians is a letter that Paul is writing to specific local churches that are a part of the region of Galatia. It is plural indicating that this letter was intended for multiple local churches. So, we see evidence of both the Church Universal and the church local.

So, as we talk about what the church is, we see Jesus institute the Church and that it exists in two expressions. The New Testament also tells us [how The Church began](#). Flip over to Acts chapter 2. To set the stage, Jesus ascended into heaven before they disciples' eyes. They went back to Jerusalem, to the upper room. They were led to replace Judas with another apostle and that wound up being Matthias.

The Bible says about 120 people gathered together in that upper room. And something extraordinary happened. Jesus had promised that when He left, the Holy Spirit would come. And that's exactly what happened. Acts 2, verses 1 and 2. *¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.* On Pentecost, The Holy Spirit came and birthed the Church. He empowered the disciples on that day, and Peter preached a sermon. At the conclusion of that sermon, 3,000 people got saved, and the Church was off to an amazing start and hasn't looked back since. Pentecost was the Church's birthday. And The Holy Spirit continues to indwell believers and empower us to carry out the mission of The Church.

What is the [mission of the Church](#)? Well, Jesus gave the church its mission. It is called the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20. *¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

According to Jesus, The Church's mission is to make disciples of all nations. Every bible believing, Christ exalting, church is given that mission. It is our mission here at Trinity. And for nearly 40 years, this church has sought to fulfill this mission. By God's grace, Trinity will celebrate 40 years of ministry this coming January. We are going to have a ton of fun doing that, by the way. Mark your calendars for January 28 and 29 of 2023. That's when our church turns 40 (the actual date is in February, but that is when we are going to celebrate). And by God's grace we are going to look forward to at least 40 more years of fulfilling the Great Commission. Amen?! So long as The Lord tarries. The Church, both universal and local, are to be about making disciples. It is what we must do.

Now, another thing that is extremely important to note when defining The Church is to know that The Church is not perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect church. It doesn't exist. Church is made up of broken people therefore it is imperfect. But even in our imperfection, I want you to hear me, **there is nothing like the local church when the church is doing what it is called to do.** Nothing can rival the church!

ILLUSTRATION: Yellow Hats

Following Katrina, I started pursuing another degree from New Orleans Seminary. I would fly into New Orleans and attend classes for a week and then do everything else online. When I would arrive in New Orleans, I would arrange for a taxi to take me to the seminary campus. About a 30-minute drive. I would ask the driver to tell me about their Katrina story. It stories were amazing.

I heard similar stories from everyone I talked to. They were all quick to tell of the shortcomings of FEMA. Do you remember the disaster all that was? After talking about FEMA, they would say, "But there were these people in yellow caps that really helped out." Do you know who the yellow caps are? [\[Show Pic\]](#)

They are people associated with the Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief Ministry. In other words, the government entity, FEMA, couldn't hold a candle to the church deployed. That's because there is nothing like the Church when the Church is doing what Jesus asked us to do.

All that to work to define the Church. You with me?! Great. Second question...

2. Church: Who Needs It?

You know, we live in a society that is asking, "What's the big deal about church?" There is disinterest and even disillusionment when it comes to church.

Dean Merrill published a book entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church." In his book he referenced statistics concerning church trends. He said, "On any given weekend about 37% of Americans show up in church. The other 63% are reading the paper, drinking coffee, sleeping in, playing golf, or engaging in some other form of recreation."^v Now, that's based on data from 1997!

I read another article, written in June of this year, that said, "less than 50% of Americans are saying they are members of a church."^{vi} In other words, the majority of people in our country, now, are asking, "Who needs church?" I think that is actually an age-old question.

And I want to answer that question two ways. Who needs Church? **First, we do.** You and I need church. From the very beginning we see how God wired us for relationships. The very core of our longing is for relationships. But truth be told, people are finding community in other organizations and places outside the church. So, what I would say to that is, in addition to our need for community, we have a need for truth. We live in a world where though information is readily available, truth seems to escape us. So where do we find truth? Well, we find it in the Church. And when I say church, I presuppose the true church, the church that preaches and teaches Jesus and stands on The Word of God.

1 Timothy 3:15 says, "¹⁵*if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is **the church of the living God**, [it is to be] **a pillar and buttress of the truth**.*" In the midst of all the talking heads and all the opinions floating out there, we need truth. What is truth? God's Word is true. You and I need to be centered on biblical truth. And the more our world drifts toward other avenues of reality, we need the church as it teaches the truth

unashamedly. We need a place where we can both gather, build relationships, and seek the face of God together and be grounded in the truth.

It is often at this point that many people will say that we don't have to go to church to be a Christian. Yes, that's true. Sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in your garage makes you a car. But consider a football player. What can a player accomplish apart from a team? Or an instrument apart from the orchestra. Or a soldier apart from an army. You get the point. It has always been The Lord's design for the church to be a greenhouse where He can grow strong followers of Him. We need one another, we need the truth, and we need the church.

I think another way we can realize the importance of church to us is to think about the purpose of the church. It has at least four distinct purposes. 1) To worship God corporately, 2) share the Gospel with the world, 3) teach us more about Jesus and 4) to love one another and others in ministry and serving. You and I need each other to accomplish those vital things in our lives. Who needs church? We do.

But also, **the world does.** And when I say the world, I am meaning our community, our state, our country, and the world.

The metaphor most often used to describe the Church in the New Testament is the body of Christ. One person doesn't form the body of Christ. We, together, make up the body of Christ. And when we each play our role, we become the hands and feet of Jesus in our community, in our nation and around the world. Romans 12:4 and 5 says, "⁴*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,* ⁵*so we, though many, are **one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.***"

Communities, countries, and people are better when the Church is at its best. Why? Because it is the physical manifestation of Jesus. Yes, The Church has flaws. Yes, I'm not perfect. And neither are you. However, The Church has positively impacted the world in profound ways, even in its imperfection. It has been the hands and feet of Jesus to a hurting world. Take for example, how The Church has championed education and healthcare? Look around at even the most prestigious universities in our country. They were founded by the Church. Look at the leading hospitals. Founded by the Church.

Listen, I love the Church. I hope you love the Church. And in a world that is asking who needs it, I hope you see that you and I need it and the world needs us. I truly believe the Church's best days are ahead of us. In a world that is experiencing increasing hurt and conflict, The Church has an opportunity to be a beacon of light and hope. It has risen to that in the past and we can do it again.

This leads perfectly in my third and final point of discussion. We've defined the church and we've talked about who needs the church. Number 3...

3. Church: Let's build it.

Let's be a part of leading the Church to be that beacon of light and hope once again! Now, I want to be very clear about an important theological perspective regarding church. Jesus is the leader of the Church. Back in Matthew 16, Jesus says in verse 18, *"¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **my church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The Church is not my church, it is Jesus' Church. The Church does not belong to a group of elders, a Pope or a denomination. The Church belongs to Jesus. By His blood, Jesus purchased the Church.

But here's the deal, while Jesus is the leader and owner of the Church, He invites us to be a part of what He is doing in and through His Church. By His Spirit, those of us that are in Christ have been given spiritual gifts. And the bestowal of these gifts gives you and I a role in His Church. You have a role in Jesus' Church! What is that role? Well, it's to use your spiritual gifts for the edification of The Church and the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Listen, it is not God's desire to gift you and not utilize your giftings. He has gifted you for a purpose. And by my observation, from over 20 years of ministry, many Christians come and partake in the ministries of the church but never get in the game. One Pastor I read this past week equated that with being on church welfare.^{vii}

Did you know that at Trinity we have over 30 ministries in our church. Ministries on our campus, ministries in our city, and ministries around the world. And there are ministries that we can create that can serve our community, to meet needs, that are just waiting for you. God has given you a spiritual gift, or multiple gifts, and He expects us to exercise those gifts. When I say, Church:

Let's build it, I mean that I want us each to get a job and go to work for the Kingdom.

I love Romans 12:4-8, *"⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, **let us use them**: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."*

The invitation from our Lord is to leverage your gifting for His glory and for the edification of the church! I want to talk practical for just a moment. When you came in, there was a serve card on your seat. It looks something like this.

I mentioned just a moment ago that it is time for us to get a job. And guess what. We have job openings. On that sheet is a list of help wanted. Ways that you can be a part of what The Lord is doing in and through our local church. And we need you! Perhaps you have a gift and a passion for something that is not listed here. That's why we have a fill in the blank. Let us know about a passion you have and then let's talk about how we can utilize that passion to impact lives. God has invited us to be a part of what He is doing, let's go, Church!

CONCLUSION: As we close this morning, I want to ask the band to come back and lead us in a time of response.

For over 2,000 years, God has used The Church to carry out His mission in the world. I can't think of a better example of God's love than The Church. Think about it for a moment. In A.D. 33, Jesus ascended into Heaven and entrusted the gospel in their hands. The Holy Spirit empowered them, and a movement began. Despite attempts to stop The Church by way of persecution, it only grew stronger. Many gave their lives for The Church. And here we are, today, in church!

The church is proof of God's love. I think when Jesus handed this over to the disciples, in His omniscience, peered through history and saw you and me. 2 things He saw: 1) Our need for salvation and 2) Our receiving the baton...

ENDNOTES:

- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systemic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical, Volume II*, BIBAL Press: North Richland Hills, 2001; Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1999; Christopher Morgan, Essay: *The Origin and Nature of the Church*, article published by The Gospel Coalition, accessed online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/origin-nature-church/>; Witness Lee, *Four Crucial Elements of the Bible, The-Christ, the Spirit, Life, and the Church*, article published by Living Stream Ministry, accessed online: <http://www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/THE-CHURCH-IN-THE-NEW-TESTAMENT.HTML>; Luis Ángel Díaz-Pabón, *What is The Church? It's Role and Purpose According to the Bible*, article published October 21, 2019, BibleStudyTools.com, accessed: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-church-according-to-the-bible.html>; Various articles from GotQuestions.org, *What is the church?, What is the purpose of the church?, What is the rock in Matthew 16:18, and Why is church attendance / going to church important?*, accessed online at: <https://www.gotquestions.org>; Jack Graham, *The Glory of the Church*, sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church, sermon accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvoQniO88kY>; Skip Heitzig, *The Church? Who Needs It?*, sermon preached at Calvary Church Albuquerque, March 22, 2009; Mary Fairchild, *What Is the Church?* Learn Religions, Article published August 28, 2020, accessed online: learnreligions.com/what-is-the-church-700486.
- ⁱⁱ Illustration taken from Dr. Tony Evans sermon entitled, *The Importance of the Church*, accessed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_M9GpqFsVg.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Jack Graham, *The Glory of the Church* sermon.
- ^{iv} Christopher Morgan, Essay: *The Origin and Nature of the Church*, article published by The Gospel Coalition, accessed online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/origin-nature-church/>.
- ^v Dean Merrill, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1997, page 43.
- ^{vi} Michael Lee, *American Churches Closing Faster Than New Ones Can Open*, article published by Fox News, accessed online: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/american-churches-closing-faster-new-ones-open>.
- ^{vii} Graham, *The Glory of the Church*.