

St Martins C3 – September 14, 2025

Christ-Centred Community – A New Vision of Church

Sermon Notes:

Read Matthew 16:13-23

This passage includes the first mention of the word church in the New Testament. All concepts of church are built from this foundation.

There are two ideas modern people have that make it hard to commit to a church:

1 – Church is made for us

We live in a consumeristic world where the individual is the most important thing. The result is that church is treated like a product made to serve our spiritual fulfilment. But if that product isn't working then we either find another "brand" or just reject it entirely.

2 – We only see a caricature of Church

There are many different features to Church:

- Building
- Event
- Organisation
- Club

Each of these ideas includes elements of the nature of the church. The issue comes when these elements are overemphasized. When that happens all we can see is a caricature of the true nature of the church, which can either seem comical or repulsive.

In Matthew 16, we see a radically different vision of the nature of the church:

1 – It is Christ-Centred

Peter's declaration of Jesus' true nature became the catalyst for Jesus to first talk about the church. Those who will be part of this new movement are those who confess that Jesus is the Christ. The Christ is the Greek term for "Messiah", the one who is sent by God to make the world right.

2 – It is a Community

The word for church used here literally means an assembly of called out ones, a worshipping congregation (e.g. Psalm 22:22). It is about the gathered people – the community.

The hallmark of the church that Jesus built is love (John 13:35). Love that forgives. Love that honours God. Love that spurs others on towards good deeds. Love that cares for those in need. Love that gets involved in the messiness of people's lives. Love that reaches those who are lost. Love that is the hope of the world.

3 – It has Authority but Imperfection

The authority of the church is directly linked to its confession of Jesus as Lord of all things, but it is still imperfect.

Now we can see some of the elements of the church in their correct perspective. Now we can see that church was not made for us, we were made for church. Church is not something we go to, it is something we together are.

May we see what Jesus wanted in His church and commit to being a Christ-centred community here at St Martins C3.

Questions for Connect Groups:

Key Point

Don't just go to church, be the church by being part of a Christ-centred community.

Questions

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What does this message tell you about God and humans?

How has our modern individualistic consumerist culture had an impact on the way we view the church?

Read Matthew 16:13-23 and Matthew 18:15-20. These are the only two references to the church in the gospels. What do they tell us about the nature of the church?

Talk of the features of the church - building, club, event, organisation. What is the problem if the church is only defined as these things? What part do these ideas have in telling us about the true nature of the church?

Discuss the implications of this statement: Church wasn't made for us; we were made for the church.

What are the things that hold us back from being a Christ-centred community at St Martins C3?

How can we be Christ-centred in this group?

In what ways can we love each other with the sacrificial love that Jesus asks?

Monday Devotion: Church is a Gathering of Christians

Read 1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19, 28, Deuteronomy 4:10

The New Testament was written in Greek, and the main word used for church was the word *ekklesia*. This word became so prominent that the study of the church is known as ecclesiology. So, it is helpful for us to track the way this word was used in the Bible.

The first way it is used was to describe the gathering of a group of God-followers. In fact, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *ekklesia* was the translation of the Hebrew *qahal* which meant an assembly, congregation, or meeting. In Deuteronomy 4, Israel gathered together to hear God's words are called an *ekklesia*.

Similarly, in the New Testament the church gatherings were known as *ekklesia*. The early church saw that meeting together in an ordered, but Spirit-led way, was an essential part of the nature of their community. They were encouraged not to give up meeting together but to use those times to encourage each other and to come into God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-25).

We make a mistake if we believe that church is just what happens from 10-11:20 am on a Sunday morning. We make an equal mistake if we believe that church is possible without gathering with other Christians. As we come together, we are a sign to the world around us of what true love and life look like. Commit to gathering with other Christians, and today pray that God would be honoured in our gatherings.

Tuesday Devotion: Church is Christians **Meeting Regularly in a Home**

Read Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19

As the Jesus movement grew, *ekklesia* began to mean much more than just a big church meeting. In larger cities like Rome, it was impractical or dangerous for people to meet all together. Instead, they began to meet in people's homes to worship and to learn about how to live for Jesus.

A key mention of this is found in Paul's final remarks in both Romans and 1 Corinthians. Here he commends Priscilla and Aquilla whose *ekklesia* is meeting in their home.

It is clear from the beginning that the local church would take on many different forms. Contrary to the opinion of some, there is no one directive as to what a church should look like, either in its meetings or its governance. The New Testament references to church are largely situational, dealing with the specific circumstances of that community of believers.

As well as church meetings, we believe it is essential for Christians to meet in smaller gatherings: either one-on-one or in connect groups. These environments are easier places to embody many of the values of community and love that are central to the meaning of church.

This week, go to your connect group. Commit not just to meeting socially but supporting each other to grow in the knowledge of God and help each other live for Him in all you do. If you're not in a group, then please let us know.

Wednesday Devotion: The Church is All Christians in One City

Read 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 16:19: Revelation 2:1-7

The third definition of *ekklesia* (can you see there is a depth to this term?), is to refer to the totality of believers in one city. Paul writes to “the church of God in Corinth”. This kind of reference is to a collection of individual congregations, a number of different house churches, which are nevertheless also, together, the “church”.

We also see in Revelation that Jesus walks among the lamp stands of the church. Each of these seven churches is a collection of congregations in a city. Jesus sees what they are doing together and gives them correction and commendation.

We are blessed to be part of the church in Ōtautahi, Christchurch. St Martins C3 is not the only church that is a true follower of Jesus. There are many other congregations in Christchurch, and we work together for God.

This week, I met with the interim vicar at St Martins Presbyterian. Together we shared our heart for the area and for the name of Jesus to be lifted up in our church congregation. We even talked about a few ways they might be able to partner in the future.

Today, pick another church in our city and pray for it. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ also bringing God’s kingdom.

Thursday Devotion: The Church is all the Christians on Earth

Read 1 Corinthians 10:32; 12:28

Did you know that there are approximately 2.8 billion Christians on Earth? Together, we are the Church. I always find it helpful to differentiate between a local expression of the church and the worldwide Church by using a big “C” for the worldwide Church and a small “c” for the local congregation.

In these passages, Paul writes about “the Church of God”. There is a strong sense in the New Testament of a new people, a new race, emerging. In fact, one of the best definitions of the Church is “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9).

Together we are God’s people on Earth. Almost like our own nation. That is why we pray for those who are following Jesus overseas. It is particularly important that we keep in mind and pray for those who are in parts of the world that are undergoing intense persecution and suffering. They need our prayers because they are part of the same Church family.

Now, we see four different meanings of the word *ekklesia*. It is a meeting, a group of believers gathered in a home, the church of the city, and the church around the world. It is important for us to engage with the Church at each of these levels. We were made to be part of God’s body, his family, this Christ-centred community. Consider today how you can devote yourself more to one of these expressions of Church.

Friday Devotion: Church is a Place of Love

Read 1 Corinthians 13; John 13:35

This morning I woke up with the For King and Country song [By Our Love](#), going through my head. It is a song that proclaims our unity in the Spirit. It repeats the refrain from John 13:35: “they will know we are Christians by our love.”

The thing that makes us distinct as a Christian community is the love that we show to other Christians. This is why we are different from any organisation or club, and why church being defined as a building or an event just doesn’t make sense.

Church is not about ticking off your religious duty to God by turning up on a Sunday. Nothing could be further from the heart of what Church is all about. Church is about a commitment to God that is seen in the way that care is shown to other Christians.

Being involved in a church like St Martins C3 is a commitment to showing this kind of love and deep and meaningful ways to others. It is a radical vision that we are all called to because of the love that has been given to us first through Jesus.

Consider the ways that you can raise your love up a level this week. Pray for those in need. Reach out to those who are hurting. Walk alongside those who need it the most. Serve the world together in love. That is what it means to be the Church.