

We Come to Church to...
Work with Christ
1 Corinthians 12:12

At the Stephen Ministry meeting Tuesday evening, Frank Andrews led us in a study of “Lonely Saints.” It was a look at great people of the Bible who suffered from doing God’s work alone. The prime example was Jeremiah. But it doesn’t take much thought to come up with a number of great people of the Bible who suffered from loneliness. Adam and Eve were literally alone. Abraham and his family went alone to a strange land. Jacob was a fugitive, running for his life, all alone when he had the dream of the ladder into heaven. Moses was also a fugitive when he saw God in the burning bush. When the prophet Elijah fell into despair, he complained that he was all alone in his battle against the false gods. All the other prophets stood alone against kings and against the crowds. All these and many others suffered alone.

But all those examples of lonely saints are from the Old Testament. Can you think of any lonely saints in the New Testament? The only one who suffered and died alone was Jesus, when the disciples abandoned him. I can’t think of another example of a lonely saint in the New Testament.

And that’s no accident. Jesus worked to make sure his disciples did not have to do their work alone. He called twelve disciples and spent three years forming them into a fellowship who worked together and supported each other. When he sent them out, he didn’t send them out alone. After his resurrection, he found the disciples together in the Upper Room. At Pentecost they were together praying. When Barnabas went out to share the gospel, he had a team that traveled with him. One of his team was Paul. When Paul later split off from Barnabas, he also put together a team. Paul was never alone. He always had his fellow Christians around him. When Paul shared the gospel in a new town and people accepted Christ, he would form them into a fellowship that came together often.

Christians don’t do the work of Christ alone. We do it together.

John Wesley said that there is no such thing as solitary religion. A person who is led by Christ will always seek the fellowship of the church—because Christ leads us to the church. And the reason Christ leads us to the church is because Christ knows we are stronger and more effective in fulfilling the mission and ministry of Christ when we work together.

One person working alone is simply not as effective getting the job done as a group of people working together harmoniously. As Christians we have a job to do. We can get that job done far better when we do it working together as the church.

We’ve been asking the question, “Why do we support the church?” When you became a member, you made a commitment to support the church with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and, if you joined in the last couple of years, your service. The question is, why are you faithful to fulfill that commitment?

One answer could be, “I gave my word, and, by gum, I never go back on my word.” At one level that would be a great answer. We do admire people who are faithful to their commitments. At another level, I, as a pastor, would be concerned about someone whose only reason for supporting the church is because they said they would. That would be like a man saying to his wife, “I’m going to stick with you because I made a vow, and I’m a man of my

word.” That’s good, as far as it goes. But if that’s the only reason he is staying in the marriage, it is probably not a very healthy or satisfying marriage for either of them.

Isn’t there a better reason than, “just because I said I would?” Yes, sure there is. When we ask, “Why do we come to church,” the answer in one word is “Christ.” What we have seen is that we are drawn to the church by Christ. We come to church to hear the words of Christ. These are words which have been entrusted to the church by Christ, who is the Word of God. We come to hear words which come from the Creator of the universe.

We come to church to worship Christ. As we look at the world, there is a lot of ugliness. As we see the desecration of creation, as we read of suicide bombers and wars, as we see the loss of civility, we are tempted to throw our hands up in despair. Then we go to church and see the goodness and beauty of Christ. He is all that is right and good and worthy of being worshipped and praised. And we are reminded that he is the future of creation. The world is under construction. God will take the terrible things we are doing to the world and to ourselves and will use them to remake the world after the image of Christ. We come to church in despair. Then we spend our time together looking upon the goodness and beauty of Christ and are reminded that someday the world will look like him, and we regain joy and hope. We come to church to worship Christ.

We come to church to be with Christ. As spiritual beings, we are hungry for spiritual things. This world can satisfy many of our needs. But nothing this world has to offer can satisfy our need for spiritual fellowship. Christ alone can satisfy that need. And since the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ has dwelled within the church. We are drawn to the church because we hunger for Christ and Christ is most present in the church. We come to church to be with Christ.

And we come to church to work with Christ. The church is vital to Christ’s work in the world. Christ came to announce that with his ministry was the beginning of the last step of God’s plan for the world. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus came preaching, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” And we know what the Kingdom of God is. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Jesus came to teach us what God’s will for this world is, how we human beings are to live together. We are to lift each other up. We are to give as much as we can, rather than taking as much as we can. We are to serve one another, rather than seeking to be served. We are to trust God to provide for our needs, rather than fighting to take what we need or want from each other. We are to live at peace with creation, with each other, with ourselves and with God.

Christ showed us the way. In his own life, he showed us how to live. He laid down his life for us, so that we can have life. And he asks us to do the same for each other. He showed us that those who are willing to offer their lives to help others have better, stronger and happier lives will be resurrected to eternal life, just as he was.

Christ came to transform the world from hatred, selfishness, and fear to love, generosity and faith.

And Christ called the church to continue the ministry which he began. When the church is being the church, we are lifting up this vision of the Kingdom of God here on earth. We are teaching it to the world through our words and through our example.

Christ placed his Spirit in the church to draw us to the church, to unite us, and to empower us as we do the work of building the Kingdom.

And we will accomplish the mission Christ to which Christ has called us. He promised we would. One day Jesus spoke to Simon Peter. He said, “You are Peter (which means ‘rock’) and upon this rock I will build my church. And the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

Now some have interpreted that to mean that Peter is the foundation of the church. That’s not what Jesus was saying. Peter symbolized those who follow Christ. You and I are the rocks upon which the church is built.

As we allow Christ to unite us in his Spirit, the church is made strong and effective. Nothing can stop us from completing the task to which we have been called.

Satan took control of this world and built it in his image. He built a world in which power and control is the ultimate goal. Taking all you can for yourself is the key to a success and happy life. Using people for your own purposes is smart. Destroying people who get in your way is not a great concern.

Satan corrupted God’s creation, and then he built a fence around it with a mighty gate. He was certain that he had built himself an empire which could not be overcome. He was wrong. Christ formed the church and gave us a battering ram. He has said to us, “Use truth, love, and righteousness to knock down the gate of this kingdom of evil.” That’s what the church has done. We have knocked down that gate, and we are in the walled city. We are slowly but surely transforming it into from a world of hatred and greed into a world of love and peace.

We couldn’t do this alone. Peter could not have knocked down the gates of hell alone. None of us could have. But together, as the church, led by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, we can knock down every stronghold of evil. We can build the Kingdom.

When we work in the church, we are working side by side with Christ. We are accomplishing great and wonderful things. We are not alone. We are a part of a team. And we will win the victory.

We support the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness because we are the church. And, as the church, we work with Christ, as he is building the Kingdom of God on earth.

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