



from the desk of . . .
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The Apostles' Creed - 10

... THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH; THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Matthew 16:13-18

The 2nd congregation that I served was in Altoona, PA. Now the most famous thing Altoona is known for is the Horseshoe Curve. (X) Horseshoe Curve was completed in 1854 by the PA Railroad as a way to crossover the Allegheny Mountains. At the time it was built it was considered to be an engineering marvel.



During WWII the Curve was even targeted by Nazi Germany in 1942 as part of Operation Pastorius.

Horseshoe Curve has long been a tourist attraction, & I remember, even as a boy, going over to Altoona to see it, & the attached Railroaders Memorial Museum.

Now in the Museum there's a huge steam locomotive. (X)

Beside this complicated machine, is a sign detailing the boiler pressure, size, the # of wheels, horsepower, length, weight, & so on.



Now the interesting thing was the little footnote explaining that 96% of the power generated was used to move the locomotive, & only 4% was left to pull the load.

You know, some churches are like that. It takes so much energy to keep the people within happy & "blessed", that there's little left to reach out to others.

Charles Dickens began his book, "A Tale of 2 Cities", with these words ... "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." That could be said about the Church.

We certainly don't have to look far to see the problems in it.

The Church is seduced by power, pride, & popularity. The majority of churchgoers don't tithe 10% ... even 5%.

We idolize sports & music, & the famous people involved in them. We cling to tradition out of fear & lack of faith. We're indifferent to people's needs.

We cater to please ourselves. We complain & criticize. We lack passion & compassion. We want to be blessed, but refuse to be a blessing to others.

And yet, some are faithful. Some tithe, even above & beyond the expected 10%. The Church in places around the world takes the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31) & the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) seriously.

That is ... love God totally, love our neighbors, & go make followers of Jesus.

Some churches pray as if it all really does depend on God. Some churches are truly obedient to The Holy Spirit in all things. Some churches unselfishly behave as if they are spiritually directed.

You see, the Church is bigger than what we see around us. Scripture teaches that (X) the Church is a radiant bride, preparing to meet her Lord. (The Revelation 19:7-8)

Isn't that a wonderful image? ...

The Church is an expectant bride waiting for Jesus!



Now, sometimes she's less than sparkling ... but she is still the Church. And we're part of it. Let me throw out a question, which I want you to ponder for a moment ... do you add to, or subtract from the Church's radiance? ... Think about that honestly.

Here's another one ... if everybody at C.C.R.M. gave like you, attended like you, prayed like you, served like you, worshipped like you, what would this place be like? ...

This morning we're going to look at the Church as we continue on our series through the Apostles' Creed.

We state ... "I believe in the Holy Christian Church."
Do we? Do you? Is the Church worth believing in? ...

Listen now to Good News, as recorded by Matthew to you who have gathered here this morning for worship. Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet."

"What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

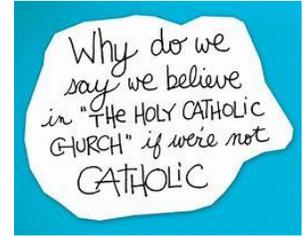
"Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it." (Matthew 16:13-18)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

This is the 10th message in our 12-message series on the Apostles' Creed. And the phrase that we're focusing on this morning raises a red flag immediately for some of us.

For those of us who grew up reciting The Apostles' Creed we're used to saying ... "I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy ... (catholic) ... church." (X)

And using the word "catholic" causes confusion & distress for some Protestants.



Now if we were just talking & I said something about the "catholic church" ... most likely we'd think of St. Collette, or some other Roman Catholic congregation.

So, the 1st thing we need to do this morning is define a couple of words ... because "catholic" has a # of different theological connotations for us. "Catholic" in this instance, with a small "c", means **Christian** or **universal**. "Holy" means **set apart for special use**. It would be like setting aside a particular suit or a dress for a special occasion.

So, when we used to say ... "I believe in the holy catholic church" ... what we meant is that we believe in "the set apart universal Christian church."

Now God's doing the setting apart ... & He's doing it universally across the whole world for all-time. Which is why we, here at C.C.R.M., to help reduce the confusion, use the modern form of The Apostles' Creed ...
"the holy Christian church."

The other phrase is, "the communion of saints."
"Communion" means **fellowship**.

But it's fellowship in a much deeper sense than just standing outside the nursery with a cup of chai or coffee & chatting with one another. Fellowship here means sharing life together: joys, sorrows, a common purpose.

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

And finally, "saints." Down through the years "saint" has come to mean someone who's lived an exemplary life; i.e., St. Francis of Assisi or St. Patrick.

But "saint", as it's used in Scripture, simply refers to people who are **sacred to God**.

So, Paul writes to the saints in his letters (in Achaia, Ephesus, Philippi, Rome, to mention a few) ... to those people who were holy to God in His Church. This means that in God's eyes, you & I, having come to faith ... are considered "saints".

Okay, let's look at these affirmations.

"I believe in the holy Christian church."

And what I want us to think about for a few moments this morning is ... what does "Church" mean to people today? And, what does God say about His Church? And, what should be done in response?

What does "Church" mean to people today? (X)

Barna Research provides all kinds of statistical information for Pastors & theologians.

Barna Group
Knowledge to navigate a changing world

It reports that 40% of American adults are "regular" churchgoers, with about 18% attending on a typical weekend. That means that between 60 & 82%, by their own actions, indicate that Church is not relevant to their lives. And to be honest, they're truly missing out.

But I suspect that they have their excuses.

Maybe it has something to do with a past experience. Maybe some hurt that was not resolved. Maybe they just felt that there were a lot of more "important" things to do: sleep, shop, wash the car, play soccer, etc.

But for whatever reason, over 60% of the adults in the U.S. do not attend Church.

Another statistic from that same profile ... for those that did go to Church, they listed as the top 3 reasons why they chose to attend a particular congregation:

- ... the theological beliefs & doctrine
- ... how much the people seemed to care about each other
- ... the quality of the sermons that were preached

So, what does that tell us about why people go to Church? ... It has to do with the message that's being **proclaimed** ... & just as important, seeing that message **lived out in people's lives**.

So, I began to wonder what we thought here, at C.C.R.M., about Church.

So, I sent out an email the beginning of the week asking, "When you hear the word 'church' what do you think of?" And here are some of your responses? ...

- God's home
- A large family, related by faith
- Sunday morning services
- Worship experiences
- Our fellowship here
- My experiences at C.C.R.M.
- Witnessing mandella ... the circle of life
- Buildings, bureaucracies, budgets
- A house of worship
- God, family, comforting, familiar
- Where I see most of my best friends who will be with me forever
- A place where I can go to be at peace & concentrate on myself & the Lord
- Christian community
- The choir
- A place, generally a building where one worships God
- The 1st thing I think of is the building
- A place where I can come & be fed the words of God
- A house of God
- The body of Christ
- A place which has set aside time for worship
- Sunday School
- Childhood memories

I appreciated all those responses, but my guess is, if we're all honest, most of us, when we 1st hear the word "church," probably do associate it (X) with some structure, some building. But, obviously, that's not the whole story.



Being a non-denominational Church here brings a wide variety of people & theological experiences ... what are some of your Church backgrounds? Mine is Presbyterian, how about yours? ... (*Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran*) That's good. And some of you may have grown up in this Church ... raise your hands if you have. And others of you may have had no Church background at all.

I believe that the Church should be a place where:

- seekers are welcome
- teaching is relevant
- worship is passionate
- kids are valued
- community is authentic
- mission is worldwide
- &, service is fulfilling

And for those of us who are involved & committed to the Church we find that it's really irreplaceable in our lives. Nothing compares to it for **significance & purpose**. We believe that God uses the Church to **change lives** like nothing else in this world.

Now to be perfectly fair, not everybody feels that way about Church. I've talked to people over the years who have told me, very clearly, that they don't like one thing or another about Church.

Here are a couple of things that I've heard ...
"The Church talks about money too much."

And yes, I do talk about money & possessions ... but the reason I refer to it as much as I do is because of what Scripture teaches.

The Bible has about 600 verses that deal with prayer.

There are also about 600 verses concerning faith. But it has over 2,300 verses about money & possessions!

God obviously knows enough about us to recognize that this is an issue that we're struggling with every day, all day long ... so there's a lot of instruction dealing with money in Scripture.

There's a lot that needs to be talked about.

Another concern ...

"The Church is too demanding."

There are those who are tired of being expected to do "one more thing." "Hey, I've done my share."

And I acknowledge that I've often challenged people. I've challenged each of you. The reality is, almost any Church that you attend will have a personality a lot like their Pastor.

And speaking for myself ... I'm on a mission to know Jesus, & to share that knowledge with as many as I can.

So, for those who feel that Church should simply be a place where they can come & sit & relax, & then, just leave, feeling good ... C.C.R.M. isn't the place for them.

So, what does the Church mean to people today?

Unfortunately, for the majority it's irrelevant. It's not a factor in their lives. For some the Church is irrational. But for many, the Church is **irreplaceable**. Do you have a sense about which one of those groups you're in this morning? ...

And as you're thinking about that, let's look at the 2nd question ... what does God say about His Church?

The Church is the reason He created the world.

The Church is the result of His Son's sacrifice.

The Church is His return to intimate contact.



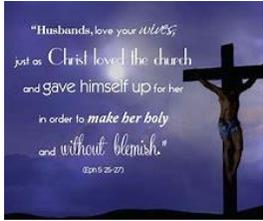
(X) Jesus stated ...

"on this rock foundation I will build my church."

Now, of course, Jesus wasn't referring to a building made of bricks, & stone, & wood. He wasn't talking about a structure like we have here. The Church Jesus had in mind was going to be "built" out of flesh & blood ... your flesh & blood. My flesh & blood. The Church Jesus intended to build was to be made of **you & me**.

We are the Church, & wherever we are ... we are the Church. Jesus died on the cross & rose from the grave to save us & make us part of His Church.

Now most people don't realize how important the Church is to Jesus. Scripture teaches that the Church is the "Bride of Christ".



(X) Paul writes ... "Christ loved the church & gave his life for it." (Ephesians 5:25)

The Church is the **Bride of Christ** ... & Jesus loves her!
He died for her!

Over the years I've been asked on more than one occasion if a person can be a "Christian" & not be part of the Church.

Listen to what John writes ...

"If we live in the light - just as he is in the light - then we have fellowship with one another." (1 John 1:7)

Now, look at that closely ... "If we live in the light - just as he is in the light - then we have fellowship with one another." Or, another way to say it ... if we **don't** have fellowship with one another we **aren't** living in the light as He is in the light. If you & I don't have fellowship with other believers ... something's wrong.

Now, there are people who say they can be a good Christian without being with Church. But that's a lie!

Granted, they can be a "Christian" without being with the Church. But they can't be a "good" Christian without the Church.

You see, the Church is the "Bride of Christ."
We just read that ...

"Christ loved the church & gave his life for it."

If a "believer" says they don't want to be with the Church ... if they say they really don't like the Church ...
what they're telling Jesus is:

- "I don't like your bride"
- "I can take you Jesus ... but I can't be bothered with that which you have sacrificed your life for"

Now correct me if I'm wrong ... but I'm not ... I'm pretty sure that's not going to go over very well with Jesus.

Now because I love the Church so much, it's hard for me to imagine why people don't want to be around it;
don't want to be a part of it.

Well, the fact of the matter is, the Church is sometimes ... difficult. Have you ever heard of a Church where there's been divisiveness? ... Where there's been backbiting & gossiping & folks saying nasty things about each other? ... Of course, you have. We all have.

Someone once said ... "The church is something like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the smell inside."

Now why would the Church be "difficult"? Why would Christians "be hard to live with"? We'd think that because Jesus has saved us & we've been "born again" ... that we'd be just like little babies ... cute & cuddly.

The problem with babies is that they're not always cute & cuddly. They cry ... & they cry ... & they cry.

They fuss & they throw tantrums.

They wet their diapers, & then they fill their diapers.

And then, they get into the terrible 2's.

And then they get older ... & they know everything.

Church members can be like that. Do you think that's a surprise for Jesus? ... Of course not.

But He died for us anyway.

And He's given us the Church because He knew we needed each other. Because, (even at our worst), we **benefit** from just being together.

Insurance studies show that regular Church attendance adds almost 6 years to a person's life.

So, if we go to Church regularly ... we live longer.

And we learn from each other. I've been a preacher for over 40 years & I still love going to Bible study & S.S. I still learn things I'd never seen before, (or have forgotten). And I benefit from seeing Scripture through the eyes of someone else.

So, we learn more when we're around other Christians.

"Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love & to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

So, when we're an active part of the Church
we do more for Jesus.

I read an article recently about a trend among well-off or retired Americans who are spending their own money to travel to needy parts of the world to serve as volunteers. The woman writing the article had spent 2 weeks at an orphanage in Romania. She spent her time giving focused attention to some handicapped children who are hardly ever touched, cared for, or loved.

One woman, who stayed on after the other volunteers returned home, reported that the children were mostly neglected, left with squalid diapers, & no one to give them any attention. Because most of the children in the orphanage have physical or mental handicaps, they are not sought after for adoption.

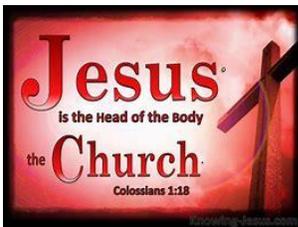
Before you & I met Jesus Christ, we were in far worse condition than the worst of those poor orphans. Even if we were decent, moral, responsible people in the eyes of the world, from the standpoint of God, who is absolutely holy, we were like newborn infants who had been thrown into an open field, & left to die. (Ezekiel 16:2-6)

Our sins, whether pride, lust, greed, selfishness, anger, or whatever, made us repulsive in God's holy sight. There was no merit in us, that He would choose us to be His children. But, Scripture teaches ...

"Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy & without fault before him. Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children - this was his pleasure & purpose." (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Talk about amazing grace ...

"In all his wisdom & insight God did what he had purposed, & made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven & on earth, with Christ as head." (Ephesians 4:9)



(X) "He is the head of his body, the church." (Colossians 1:18)
Jesus is the head ... we're the body.

It's one body ... one Church ... one family, which God is working in for all eternity. And He's allowing us to be a part of that with Him. And this is "the holy Christian Church" of the Apostles' Creed.

It's here now ... & will continue in Heaven.

Here's a definition that I especially like. The Church is the community of all true believers **for all time**.

There's no talk about denominations in Heaven. Those things that separate us now will disappear.

For all eternity, God will live with His people, the Church, His family. (The Revelation 21:3) And we, in a sense, will return to the Garden, where God from the beginning wanted to have a personal, intimate relationship, with humanity.

Now at some point in the future we're going to have that perfect intimate relationship with God. In the meantime, we get to have a taste of it with what the Apostles' Creed calls "the communion of saints."

Paul describes that in his letter to the Philippians.

"Your life in Christ makes you strong, & his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, & you have kindness & compassion for one another. I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, & being one in soul & mind. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own." (Philippians 2:1-4)

Sounds really good doesn't it? ...

Do you feel that kind of community/communion in your life right now? To really experience it, 1st you have to become a saint. I'm going to ask 2 people to come up & share very briefly what C.C.R.M. has meant to them over the years. St. Leslie & St. Brian come on up.

Now both of you grew up at C.C.R.M. Just for the record, we all know where you regularly sit now, where were you back in the "good ol' days"? ...

In the Apostles' Creed we state that we believe in "the communion of saints."

Leslie & Brian, what has it meant for you to be part of this fellowship over the years? ...

We began this morning with 3 questions:

- What does the Church mean to people today?
- What does God say about His Church?
- What should we do in response?

You've heard the answers for the 1st 2 ...
what is your response to the 3rd? ...

MARANA THA

Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet." "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." "Good for you, Simon son John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it." (Matthew 16:13-18)

"catholic" with a small "c" means _____ or _____

"holy" means _____

"Communion" means _____

"Saint", as it's used in Scripture, refers to people who are _____

People go to a particular church because:

- ... of the message that's being _____
- ... and seeing that message _____

Nothing compares to it for _____ and _____

God uses the Church to _____ like nothing else in this world

For many the Church is _____

The Church Jesus intended to build was to be made of _____ and _____

The Church is the _____ ... and Jesus loves _____! He died for _____!

If we _____ have fellowship with one another we _____ living in the light as He is in the light

We _____ from just being together

The Church is the community of all true believers _____

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven & earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, & buried;
he descended into hell;
the 3rd day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
& sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the living & the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy Christian Church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
& the life everlasting.

Amen