

Read

Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:11-16

Ephesians 3:10-12

Consider

18 months of covid pandemic has forced us into almost complete social and physical isolation. Apart from the people we live with, we have not been seeing, eating or socializing with our friends. We don't go to church on Sundays, nor on other days for choir practices, gatherings, meetings, hangouts in the hallways and ballgames in the gym as we used to do in church before. It seems that all church activities have come to a standstill. I wonder how you feel about church now. Have you changed the way you see and feel about church? What does your church mean to you now? Do you feel you have become more distant from church or church has become more distant from you? Has your love for church grown stronger or weaker? Is 'going to church in person' still necessary since we are so used to attending worship services in the comfort of our homes now? Can we be stay-at-home Christians?

But we should be asking a more important question first: How does God see his church and what purpose does He want his church to fulfill?

Believers called into community, the Church

Last week we reflected who we are from 1 Peter 2:9 – that we are 'a chosen people', 'a royal priesthood', 'a holy nation', 'a people belong to God'. These collective nouns emphasize the plurality of believers becoming singular corporate units in Christ. The redeemed are called and assembled by Christ into communities that are no longer driven by our individualistic desires and mindsets, but united in Christ with a common purpose "that you may declare the praises of him who called you." We are no longer solo sojourners on earth. We are the Church, God's gathered people in his family.

Church is the holy temple in the Lord

Ephesians 2:19-22 gives us another beautiful picture of what church is. We are "the holy temple in the Lord". Reflect on what this means and what it entails:

1. Our relationship: we are fellow citizens, members of the same household.
2. Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – we need to study and hold on to the apostolic and biblical teachings revealed to us by God.
3. We are being built into a holy temple with Christ as cornerstone, where God's spirit lives and dwells – Christ is the center, we strive to be holy, that people can see and meet God here.

4. Our joining together and building up happens “in Christ” — 3 times the passage repeats ‘in him’, ‘in the Lord’; unity is found in Christ.
5. Our joining and being built together is an ongoing process — it is not an intermittent or one-time act; we need to stay joined and grow continually, we are a living part of this holy temple.

Church is the body of Christ

Ephesians 4:11-16 gives us yet another familiar metaphor for church. We are the body of Christ. To each of us God gives grace (4:7) and to church he gives gifts “to prepare God’s people for works of service”. Consider the purpose “that the body of Christ may be built up” and the aim that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. Note how Christ is the very center, subject and goal of our growth. Continue to read 4:14-16 for some markers of a healthy body of Christ. Take note again how Christ is the center in that all things grow up into him and from him all members are joined.

We are familiar with the Great Commission that Jesus gives us in Matthew 19-20. Speaking about the mission of church, Chris Wright says, “*It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church, the church was made for mission – God’s mission*”.¹ Ephesians 3:10 tells of God’s intent, “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”. Reflect on God’s heart for his church. Will you commit to join fellow brothers and sisters in building God’s holy temple and the body of Christ, and commit to fulfill God’s mission?

Deacon Dr. Josephine Chow

1. Chris Wright. 2006. *The Mission of God*. 62

Pray

In the midst of all the pushing and shoving among us,
in the world and in the church,
propelled by anxiety and acted as brutality,
You have planted yourself in all your fidelity,
You have placed yourself among us in steadfastness and abiding care
present in the day, alert in the night,
making us all safe and noticed and cared for.
So evidence your fidelity as to curb our anxiety,

as to refrain our brutality, as to overcome our alienation.
By your fidelity, renew us, renew church, renew city, renew world.
Give us the safety to love you fully, to love neighbor well, in glad obedience.
Amen.

Walter Brueggemann¹

1. Walter Brueggemann. 2003. *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*. 118

Diving Deeper

Missions and Unity within the Church

Read Acts 2:42-47

Imagine yourself to be a Christian in the early church. What was church life like and how would you feel about church?

What were the things that the early church Christians devoted themselves to? List them out one by one and consider:

Why would believers devote to these things?

Why are they important to the Christian life?

What could have been the driving force behind such devotion?

What were the results and impacts of such devotion and church life?

What can we learn about the missions and unity within the church?

How can we live closer **WITH** God in our lives?

How are we being **TRANSFORMED** to be more like Christ?

How is the Holy Spirit empowering us to imitate Christ in what we **DO** this week?