

"The First Day of Church"

February 8, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 2: 37-42

Today is week 2 of our sermon series on the Church. What is the Church? Who is the Church? Why is the Church? What role does it play in God's world and in our world? What are we supposed to be doing and why?

Last week we took a little time to explore worship. One of the big things the church does is gather for worship. And when done well, worship is a two-way street. On the one hand, we gather as church to worship and we are blessed. Worship feeds our souls like food, water and sleep feeds our bodies. A well-fed soul has no trouble living a life of gratitude and joy with meaning. Because a well-fed soul has gotten itself out of the center and made room for God. Even when going through hardship, we gather for worship because worship is one of the ways we draw near to God, and times of hardship are when we need that closeness with God the most. So, on the one hand, we worship for us – for what we receive. But worship is also something we give. Such the two-way street. We worship to bless God, to make God smile. As the creator and sustainer of the universe, God is worthy of our honor and praise. Yet we don't just worship God for what God has done and continues to do. We worship God for who God is. God is the supreme being of the universe who cares enough about you and me to send His Son to do whatever it took to bring us home to God again. God's heart alone is worthy of our thanks, our praise, our worship. Worship is giving God His due and bringing a blessing to God as well as receiving the blessing of a well-fed soul.

Yet beyond a place to worship, what is the Church? First of all, some things it is not. The church is not a building. Many of you remember the old Sunday School song with the motions: "The Church is not a building. The Church is not a steeple. The Church is not a resting place. The Church is the people. I am the Church. You are the Church. We are the Church together. All who follow Jesus, all around the world. Yes we're the Church together." Our verbiage sometimes refers to the church as a building. "I am going by church to drop off my community dinner supplies." We use that kind of verbiage, but we know the church is not the building.

Another thing the church is not is perfect. Billy Graham used to say if you ever find the perfect church, don't join it, or it won't be perfect anymore. -Church is made up of people and therefore it is often going to be a mess. All those people come from different places and are in different stages of their walk with Jesus. New Christians are going to look and act a whole lot like people of this world – defensive, ego driven, greedy. Mature Christians are going to look and act more like Jesus – compassionate, empowering, forgiving. And we are all mixed together.

Another thing church is not is infallible. Sometimes the Sunday School teacher is going to say something that is just plain wrong. Sometimes the preacher is going to be wrong. Sometimes the whole congregation or the whole denomination, or the universal church is going to be wrong. Some of the evangelism tactics used during the Spanish Inquisition were just wrong. Basically holding a gun to someone's head and saying, "take Jesus as your Lord and Savior or die" and then pulling the trigger if they say "no". Not okay. The crusades – not faithful. The butchering of Protestants by Roman Catholics and Roman Catholics by Protestants in Europe and especially England was not okay. We have and continue to make mistakes in understanding God's will for our time and our place. But that doesn't negate our core message. It doesn't change that Jesus is God come to earth, to be with us, to reveal more about God and ourselves, to earn our forgiveness, and show us the way of eternal life. Our mistakes don't change that truth. And there is room to do things differently within the church. Some congregations baptize infants as a proclamation that God loves us first. Others wait until a person is old enough to claim Jesus for themselves and begin a two-way relationship with the divine. It is okay to understand those things differently. Some sprinkle a little water in baptism, some pour the water, some immerse the person in the water. One doesn't have to be right and the other wrong. Some ministers cannot get married. Others get fired if they get divorced. I guess what I am saying is the church has a divine calling with divine empowerment and backing, but the church is not divine. We are not always going to get everything right. The church tries to listen to and follow God, but it is not God and you can't put everything we do and do not do on God. Sometimes it's just us.

But enough of what church is not. What is it? Today I want to look at what we learn about the church from its first day in existence. As you remember, around 50 days after Jesus's death and resurrection, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, Acts 2 tells us Jesus's disciples were gathered together when "suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." We call that day Pentecost and celebrate it as the birth of the church. It defines the first reality of the church – the Church was created by God. It is not a human idea, but was created and empowered by God. The Holy Spirit of God came upon individual people and made them instruments of God, and the church was born. That same Holy Spirit empowered Peter to first understand and then speak the truth about who Jesus was and what He did. Not only was the Holy Spirit in the speaking, but also in the hearing, as verse 41-42 of our reading says "those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

That is the first picture of Church. With the power of the Holy Spirit, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” By the end of the first day, the church was defined by 4 activities. First, “they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching.” We do that. Not only do we devote a significant part of our worship time to Christian teaching – we call it the sermon – but we also have Sunday School classes and Bible studies both in person and on Facebook. This priority follows the simply truth, you can’t grow if you don’t know. We want to know more about Jesus, more about faith, more about being one of His followers. When they put the New Testament together, they were very intentional about making sure all its teachings were closely related to one of the apostles or disciples, that way we know we are studying the apostle’s teaching and not claiming some 4th hand interpretation as truth. The goal of all that teaching and preaching and studying is to set a firm foundation on which to build life. Not be “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming,” says Ephesians 4, but to grow into Christ. To be the church, the teaching must be based on Jesus as taught by the Apostles through the Bible. Yes, we gain insight from theologians and other scholars, and yes, we need to apply it to our context; but it all must start with the Apostles teaching through the Bible.

The second church activity defined on the Church’s first day of existence is fellowship – “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.” Fellowship is about enjoying one another’s company, but it is more than that. The interaction of Church people with each other is the first place Jesus’ teachings get embodied. Fellowship is showing love for one another, not based on who they are but on who you are. Fellowship is where we lift one another up, honor one another, be kind, gentle and generous with one another. It is where we learn to show compassion and encourage one another. It is where our faith becomes real. As Jesus says in John 13, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another... By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The third activity that has defined the church since its first day in existence is “the breaking of bread.” One the one hand, “the breaking of bread” can mean sitting down and eating with one another, like we did last week. The Good News Bible translates these words, “sharing in the fellowship meals”. I am for that. On the other hand, “the breaking of bread” can also refer to sharing in the Lord’s Supper, like we did last week. The Living Bible translates these words, “Communion services”. I am for that too. First Corinthians 11 puts both the fellowship supper and communion together in what it calls an Agape meal. There the communion and the fellowship dinner are intimately connected, so I am happy to accept and practice both interpretations of “breaking the bread”.

The fourth and final activity defined as church on the first day of its existence is prayer – “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the

prayers.” The church is to be a place that promotes prayer, teaches prayer, and practices prayer. Philippians 4:6-7 encourages us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Lent starts in a couple weeks and we are going to devote our Lenten Mediation time to prayer in order to further explore this call of the church. But let me just say prayer is something the Church does. We do it when we gather together with prayers in Bible studies, committee meetings, Board meetings as well as worship. But the Church is not a building. The Church is not a steeple. The Church is not a resting place. The Church is the people. And therefore the Church is at prayer when you pray in the morning as you start your day. When you pray before meals and before you go to bed. When you lift up that short prayer during the day because someone’s who needs God’s help came to your mind. When you pray, you are the church at prayer.

Yes, you are the Church. Not perfect or infallible, but called by God. Devoted to learning more about who God is and who you are with God, gathering together with other Christians for enjoyment, support and encouragement, sharing meals and the Lord’s Supper together, who prays when we are together and when we are apart. You are the Church and we are the Church. God, thanks for making it so.

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