

“Church: The Body of Christ”

February 22, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-18,27

Welcome to the 4th and final Sunday of our series on the Church. We have talked about the Church as a place of worship where we lift up our thanksgiving and praise in order to bless God and in return we are blessed by God. We talked about the church not being a building but a people who dedicate themselves to the Apostle’s teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. We recognized the church’s core calling to be both evangelism and discipleship as one cannot exist without the other. For three weeks we have talked about some of the things the church does, but what is it? It is not a building or a steeple. It is not perfect or infallible. What is it?

The word “church” in the Bible comes from the Greek word “ekklesia.” It simply means “an assembly” or “called-out ones” – as in a group or assembly called-out from the rest of the population for a specific purpose. In New Testament times, “ekklesia” might refer to a group called out for military service to defend the town, or called out by the town to lead them, like a city council. When Jesus and the apostles used this word, they were talking about a group or assembly of people called-out by God. Not voted into office or called out by a commander, but called-out by God. Called-out from the world, out from sin, out from darkness and into God’s marvelous light. And because God called them, they didn’t look like any other group. They didn’t necessarily look like each other. They didn’t come from the same family heritage or the same social class. They were a mixture of men and women, slave and free, Jew and gentile. This was and still is a unique thing in our world. Every other group is formed by common interests within one’s ethnic boundaries, socio-economic class and often gender. But not the church. What the world divided, the church brought together as equals under God. As Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek... slave nor free... male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” – no longer limited by the world’s standards, but one in Christ’s church.

Not only is this “called-out assembly” made up differently than other groups because it is called together by God, it also takes different forms. There are local “ekklesias” like First Christian Church and First Baptist Church and The Cross and Whippoorwill Church. But the calling-out is bigger than that. We have a region we are a part of known as the Christian Church in Indiana. I currently serve on its board. When the region gathers for assemblies or church camp or Disciples Women Retreats and does its work, it is church. And the same with our denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), it is still called out-people assembling to be church. And beyond that, there is the universal church which is made up of all Christian, from all different denominations and non-denominations, all around the world. When we refer to that level of Church, we even use a capital “C” and a “the” – The Church. All those structures

help us do ministry beyond the local level, but since “The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is the people,” all those divisions are kind of artificial. Where 2 or more are gathered in Christ’s name, there is church. The New Testament uses several images for this assembly of called-out people. Ephesians 5 envisions the church as the “bride of Christ” as a way of helping us see Jesus’ love and care for us. 1 Corinthians 3 sees the church as the “Temple of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit created the Church and continues to empower it today. 1 Peter 2 reminds the church we “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” who have been, “called out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.” I don’t know why that resonates so, but I like it. “A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.”

There are other images and metaphors for the church in the Bible, but its favorite and most developed is “the body of Christ” which holds several truths for us. Jesus was God come to earth in bodily form to be present with us and bring the power of God to us. And that is the first truth of the Church as the Body of Christ. We are the presence of God on earth. Not because we are that impressive, but because God is present in the church and the church is the place God chooses to work. The church fills up a big tube of water and then immerses a person in that water. And in that act of baptism, God is at work. God reaches out to the person. God washes the person clean from their sins and shortcomings. God accepts and welcomes that person into the family of God. God changes their destiny from death to life. And God does it through the acts of the church. The same with communion. The same with the empowering relationships we build here, and with the prayers that go straight from our hearts and lips to God’s ears. The book of Acts, which is right before the book of Romans which you have started reading in your Lenten emails, is basically the story of the Holy Spirit, and how the Holy Spirit of God birthed and used the church as the continuing power and presence of Jesus Christ on earth.

A second powerful reality of the church being the continuing “body of Christ” on earth is that we the church are the continuing hands, feet and mouth of Christ on earth. We are to go and do and say what Jesus would do and say, where He would do and say it. And today, the one part of this I want to focus-in on is the church’s job as culture’s conscience. One of the things Jesus was passionate about was breaking down barriers between people as well as between people and God. Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, who He was not supposed to speak to. Jesus ate and drank with sinner and tax collectors who were defined as evil people that any good and decent person would stay away from. Jesus touched lepers and enabled them to go back to their homes. Jesus went to the Jews most hated rivals, the Samaritans, and not only invited them home but used them as examples to the Jews of what it means to fulfill the great commandment of loving God and loving your neighbor. While in a meeting planning for the 100th anniversary of worshipping in this sanctuary, I wondered out loud what a sermon from

1926 would sound like. Eve Overmars did some research at the Disciples Historical Society and found that 100 years ago, Clinton Lee Johnson preached about personal morality, cultivating Christian character, and care for the poor; but he was also reported to have preached a sermon on racism which was directed at a specific member who was active in the KKK. John C. Long made appeals for “financial and other support for African American Education.” One hundred years ago the church was the moral conscience of the community and worked to break down long-accepted racial barriers on the individual and institutional level. What barriers do we need to be breaking down today as our culture’s moral conscience? We are definitely talking about barriers between people: language barriers, ethnic barriers, social barriers, financial barriers, prejudice, hate and entitlement; but also physical barriers: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healthcare for those in need, digging wells for people and crops, blankets in the cold, hope to those who suffer disaster, are displaced from their homes, and need help starting over. Week of Compassion and Church World Service are part of being church.

And yet it is even more than that. Being the moral conscience of culture is about following God’s ways. Galatians 5 lists things like, “sexual immorality, impurity... idolatry... jealousy, anger... drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” then follows it with, “I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6 adds “thieves, the greedy, drunks, and swindlers” to the list. So as people of faith, we stay away from those things, even insulate ourselves from them. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'" The same Jesus who ate with sinners raised the bar on moral behavior higher than anyone else imagined. In Matthew 5 Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.” That is not exactly light on immorality.

Being the moral conscience of culture, being the hands, feet and mouth of Christ, doing what Jesus would do and saying what Jesus would say is one of the hardest discernment jobs of the church. Differentiating the people of God from the people of the world by how they act, and at the same time breaking through all the barriers between the world and God, is a challenging both/and tension. Do we focus on the injustice in our society or on the moral decline in our society? The answer is “yes.” And it is only possible because of the final piece of being the “body of Christ” – at least the final piece I am going to highlight today.

As 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 highlight, both the human body and the body of Christ are made up of many parts. I could do another whole sermon series on this topic, but I am already out of time. So let’s just suffice it to say, just as the human body is made up of muscles and

bones and nerves and blood vessels and tendons and organs and skin that do not look alike, act alike, or serve the same purpose, and even pushes against each other at times; yet together these different parts make the highest form of life on earth; the church as Christ's body is made up of children, adolescents and adults; rich, poor and middle class; musicians, financiers, and administrators; teachers, preachers, workers; social activists, moral hardliners, and devout prayers; cooks, taste-testers, and the hungry; you, me and us. We don't all look alike, act alike, or serve the same purpose. Yet God made it that way, giving different gifts to different people and calling them together. And together we are the church, the body of Christ. In Rochester, in Fulton County, in Indiana, in the United States, the Americas and the world; we are the body of Christ, the hands, feet and mouth of Jesus, doing and saying what Jesus would do and say.

"You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" says our focus Scripture. Called out from the world into God's marvelous light to be the "bride of Christ", the "temple of the Holy Spirit", "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people... Once we were not a people, but now you are God's people." You are, we are, the church. In worship, and teaching and fellowship, we are the church. In breaking bread and prayer and evangelism, we are the church. In discipleship, as an instrument of God, in social justice, we are the church. In fighting moral decline, in our differences, in our coming together, we are the church. In this sanctuary and around the world, we are the church. May God be blessed by us as we continue to be blessed by God.

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