

Acts 2:42-47
Do You Believe in the Church?

I. Intro

How do you think we are doing as a church?

Well... it depends... it depends what you are measuring doesn't it?

It's actually a really complex question isn't it...

Because the church is a complex place... my experience with the church testifies to that.

Dondra, Darby and I moved up to St. Louis in 2002. We helped start a church called Fellowship Church. And it was quite a ride. We were growing - people coming to Christ, people were growing in Christ, and there was a cool unity that existed between us. But... the church is a complex place, and in the middle of the fourth year we fired one of our staff. Can I confess to you that we didn't know what we were doing? And over the next year, well... let's just say things were complex. Then, the Sr. Pastor stepped down and he asked me if wanted to take over. Well with some or perhaps a lot of naivety, I took over. And it was soon thereafter, after one of the most difficult and tumultuous years of my life, I started to wrestle with the church - is this worth it? I remembering struggling with what am I doing? I started to wonder if I believed in the Church?

Well... I'm still here. And in reflection I've been pondering, 'do I believe in the church?'

You see God is at work in this world... He's working to make Himself known... and the place where I've experienced the most tangible presence of God has been through the church. And the reality is this...

God's presence is known and made known through the church. And if we lose sight of that... this thing called the church... well, you'll stop believing in it.

We have been unpacking the description of the first church in Acts 2. We've asked ourselves some important questions. Do you believe in Community? Do you believe in Generosity? And today we come to our final question, do you believe in the church? We are going to be looking at verses Acts 2:46-47 and unpacking this.

Today God is calling you to join Him in His ongoing work through the church. So, will you?

Today I want to remind you of that call and invite you to that call.

It's not optional. God's presence is known and made known through the church.

So the question before you this morning is, will you join God? Will you believe in the church?

So here is what we are going to do today.

We are going to answer two questions: What is the Church? How do we accomplish our calling?

So what is it? How do we do it?

II.. What is the church?

Chuck Swindoll a famous preacher in Texas tells a story, I'm not sure if it is true or not, but it for sure could be... One day he was preaching. And felt like he had preached a tremendous sermon. And after the service there was a seemingly nice, mature lady that came up to him. She said, 'Mr. Swindoll, this is my first Sunday here and I really enjoyed what you had to say. You see I'm looking for a new church. I tried the Baptist Church but there were too strict. I tried the Presbyterian church but they were too smart. I tried the Pentecostal Church but they went too long. I tried the Non-Denominational Church but they were too shallow. So, I'm wondering if you could help me, I'm looking for the perfect church.' And Swindoll, though for a moment, and with a little bit of grace and much truth he boldly said to the woman... 'Ma'am, my advice to you would be this... If you find the perfect church, don't go there. You'll screw it up!'

The church is not a perfect place is it. If you read through Acts, if you read through most of the books of the New Testament, the writers are constantly correcting and teaching the church because it's a mess.

It makes you wonder sometimes, why did God choose the church? Well perhaps if we had the correct definition and view of the church we would better understand.

Let's look at **Acts 2:46-47**. This is beautiful picture of the church. How would you define the church?

This week I worked with our preaching cohort on a definition and I'd like to suggest this:

The church is the expression of God's ongoing work continued through His people.

God is continuing His work and doing it through a people... and the call is for us to join God in that. That's easily stated, but the truth is it's easy to get side tracked from that. In fact, let me tease this definition out by showing you two ditches we can fall into that cause us to get off the path.

a. It's about God's ongoing Work vs. It's about my ongoing work

One ditch that we quickly and easily fall into is we lose sight of this idea that the church is the expression of God's ongoing work. I call this the Worker ditch.

We have a tendency in our flesh to make life all about us. In Gen. 11 there was a people that thought they were the center of everything. It was the first big city in the world, and they started building the tower of Babel. They got together and they worked on this great architecture, they were going to build it to the heavens and make a name for themselves. They spoke the same language and were working together, and God judges it and confuses their languages and scatters them around the world. What was the problem? GOD is the centerpiece of history! He is the one who makes a name for Himself. And when we get confused about that, havoc ensues.

Can I point something cool out to us here? You see in Genesis 11 God confused their languages, because man lost sight of God, this is His story, but here in Acts 2, the world comes together with all their languages to Jerusalem and God visits them in power through the Holy Spirit. And this time God speaks in all languages to reveal Himself. You see since the beginning of time, God is the one who is working. God is the one telling the story.

Are you tired today? Not sleepy tired... I mean tired spiritually? Have you found yourself wanting to do less and less for God because you wonder if it's worth it? Friends... you've probably fallen into the ditch where it has become about your work and you've stopped believing that God is the one who is working.

Let me illustrate this...

Do you like brownies? I love brownies. Our family loves brownies. It's a big deal for us. Almost like a sacred moment when we gather to eat brownies. Well several years ago... I have given the sacred responsibility of making the brownies. Dondra got me started, she showed me the way... and then she gave me some instructions and I said those fateful words... 'I got it from here'. Well, you know what happened, I left the brownies in too long and they were as hard as a rock. Well a couple weeks later, I was charged with making them again. Dondra started telling me exactly what to do... and I said... I got it! I got it... I got it from here. And, well... I didn't have it. Left them in too long. Hard as a rock! Well a couple weeks later... Dondra says, you're in charge, can I help you... NO! I got it! I think after two times I can figure it out... and... you know what happened? Let's just say... I am no longer allowed to make brownies.

Do you know it is a great picture of our Christian lives? God saves us, He does all the work to redeem our souls at the cost of His son... and then we say to Him... hey, I got it from here.

I became a Christian when I was 15, and that was the story of my life! I immediately became a full-blown legalist! And you know what happened? Three years later I was ready to throw in the towel. Christianity was too hard. God never asked you to do the work! He's inviting you to join Him in work!

The same way we gain the Christian life is the way you maintain the Christian life. We live the Christian life by joining God to do His ongoing work through us! And if you get that confused... you are going to burn out and be ready to quit.

The church is the expression of God's ongoing work continued through His people.

So how do we join God in that? Let me unpack the other ditch and then we can answer that question. The other ditch is this...

b. It's about being a people vs. It's about going to a place.

I call this the watcher ditch.

The church is not a place! It's a people, it's not a place.

You will find the presence and power of God in this gathering just as much as if you met in a home. This is just a building. There is nothing special about this building. This used to be Vatterott College. Did anyone go to school here? There is nothing sacred about this building... it's used to be a place where people learned how to repair electrical outlets and run HVAC.

God is not building a place... He's building a people!

God connects us from all different experiences. Have you ever considered the broadness of the stories in this room? One of you came to faith when you were 4 and one of you when you were 64. One of you came to faith when you came to the end of your rope of alcoholism and one of you came to faith when you were at the end of your rope in the corporate world. One of you came to faith out of the Ba-hai religion and one of you came to faith in your 30's after growing up in the church your whole life. There are over 100 stories in this room that testify to God's ongoing work.

God's working. He's been working through all of history and 2000 years ago He created the church. A people that would join God in that work. The problem is some of you... some of you in this very room... you have fallen into the ditch of believing the church is a place. How do you know if you've fallen into that ditch?

Let me ask you. Do you know people's stories in this room? Could you tell others about the ongoing work of God because you see it not just in your life but the lives of others in this room? Or is church for you a once a week, or maybe I should say a twice a month engagement? You find yourself saying, 'let's go to church'. If you think of the church as a place, you can't help but judge the church by things like the music, the style of preaching, the types of programs offered, how you "felt" while you were there, etc. None of these judgments are based on actual knowledge of the people who make up the church. They're just surface-level, judging-a-book-by-its-cover kind of criticisms. And you've fallen into the ditch of believing the church is a place.

Listen...God is doing a work... it's His ongoing work... and He has chosen to do that work through His people... not a place! And He is inviting you to join Him in that?!

There's a path here... the path is experiencing God through the church - **which is the expression of God's ongoing work through His people.** Some of you are in the ditch of trying to make it about your work and some of you are in the ditch of trying to make it about a place... workers and watchers... and so that leads us to the question, how do we join God in His work? What does it look like to join God?

III. How do we accomplish our calling?

We have to constantly remind ourselves that we are joining God. We are joining God in His work.

I want to suggest three ways to join God. One for each ditch and then a third one...

a. Join God as He lives – Acts 2:46

If you are in the ditch or working... of trying to prove yourself... of trying to write the story... Friends, come join God as lives.

I love this picture here in Acts. 2. They met with God day by day because He was alive! There was rest for them not work. The early church was joining God as He lived...

Are you meeting with God? This week would you consider taking 5 minutes a day to just talk with God. To acknowledge that He is alive!

I struggle with this one. I often get into the ditch of working for God. Trying to write the story. About a month ago I just started praying a simple pray when I get into the office... I say, Father help me rest in Your work, so I won't be crushed by mine.

b. Join God as He laughs – Acts 2:46

If you are in the ditch of believing this is a place than you need to join God as He laughs.

That's weird Brian... hang with me here.

God rejoices in His people and in His work. And when the people gathered together they were glad and celebrated. Do you gather with the people of God to rejoice with God as He works?

I know it's nice to get together and just be together. Can I encourage you, when you are with the people of God, rejoice together in what God is doing. Share stories about prayer and transformation. To be the church we join God as He lives... join God as He laughs... and there's a third one in this passage...

c. Join God as He loves – Acts 2:47

What does it mean that God was adding to their number? I mean does it mean that the church went from a couple hundred to several hundred or even a thousand? I think it's something very different. I think God was loving and the church was exploding.

God is a God who loves. It is His nature. It is His design. Our world is crying out for a love that is sacrificial, that is intimate, that is transparent, and that is real. And God begins to love by offering the most extravagant love to a people who don't deserve it.

Don't you want a love like that? The beauty of it is, you don't have to clean yourself up, you don't have to do anything to experience that love, God has done all the work in His son Jesus and He's inviting you today to know that love.

IV. Conclusion

I'm not asking you to go live better lives, I'm not asking you to go laugh more, and I'm not telling you to love more. Please... please... hear this very carefully. Because if you walk out of here with that weight on your shoulders it's going to last for about three minutes. Because you'll go pick up your kids and it will all come crashing down.

I'm saying this... God is working. He's been working through all of History. He's living, He's laughing, and He's loving. And He's inviting you to come join Him. But listen... joining Him means you will be with His people. And as we do that... that's when the beauty of God will be experienced.

Friends what's keeping you today from joining God today?

The church is the expression of God's ongoing work continued through His people.

Your call today church... is to join Him!

V. Communion

We're going to respond today by taking communion.

Usually when we take communion we head to the corners of the room.. but today I want to invite us to participate together, as a picture and reminder that we are the people of God. I want us to be the church and share a meal together.

And so the ushers are going to pass some crackers. And I want to ask you to hold onto the cracker and let's have a moment of prayer here and let's think about Jesus' life. That He lived perfectly. Just meditate on that for a moment and when everyone has received the cracker we will all partake together.

Jesus, on the night before He died, he took the bread and He broke it, saying this is my body broken for you... Will you join me? Let's break this together as we remember Jesus' act of love for us? **BREAK THE BREAD**

Now the ushers are going to pass the juice. And I want to ask you to hold only the juice until everyone receives it and let's have a moment of prayer. Will you reflect on Jesus' death? That He lived a perfect life but His blood was shed to pay the penalty of your sin. Meditate on that for a moment.

Jesus on the night before He died, he took the wine and he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." So, let's drink church... declaring... until He comes.