

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday June 27, 2021. "Does church still matter? Being inclusive. Can NCC thrive as a community again...again? Why church matters and what our values are."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're roughly halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's and youth areas have been fully open also and are seeing a good response. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

This is the fourth Sunday of our look at what church is, has been, and can be. It's an honest self-evaluation of where the church gets 'it' right. And by 'it' we mean being the force for good and **'for others'** it was commissioned to be. And also where the church gets it tragically wrong. Many of the ways the church gets it wrong can be summed up in two ways. One, the tendency to drift towards institutionalization. This just means that like most organizations once it reaches a certain size then in order to run more smoothly and effectively, it creates a structure and systems that are more concerned with protecting the organization than sticking to the original vision. Two, churches tend to turn inward, because that's where the finances come from, those are the people whose complaints you will hear, and honestly those are the people you know and love. This is not necessarily a bad thing. You want to take care of your people. But if not managed well this inward turn is almost always at the expense of the vision, and people not in the group. Which of course in the church world is the opposite of the purpose of the church. Church was built for people not in the church.

The first week we looked at what it means to be 'devoted' to each other. An intentional decision to commit yourself to the welfare of others..The second week we drilled down through the idea of compassion, and the specific elements of growing our ability to have compassion on others. And then last week we covered living a shared life, or what Dr. King called; **"The Beloved Community"**. People who come together embracing everyone and looking out for each other. Each of these are an important part of both our personal relationships, and what the church needs to be about.

III Sunday.

Sunday, we finished this series with a look at being inclusive and the final truth about church. That yes we do **GATHER** regularly to **GROW**, but there is this even more important element of what it means to be church. And that is to **GO!** To make our world a better place.

These are the values of NCC, and are pulled from scripture what the church is supposed to be about, and really relationships in general. We know this has been a lengthy conversation about what church is supposed to look like, but we know we all have a complicated relationship with 'church' over the years. We've had good experiences and some not so good experiences.

Where has church been a great source of strength and encouragement over the years?

Where has church been a struggle, and you've had to overcome some issues with the church?

The primary scripture is the one we've used this entire series, and it's **Acts 2:42-47**. You can revisit that passage to get your bearings for this final Sunday. The two additional passages we used for this Sunday were **Ephesians 4:12** and **Hebrews 10:24**. Read these two passages and then reflect.

What jumped out to you about these passages?

What did they reveal to you about the purpose of 'the church'?

There were two basic truths from these two passages, what a surprise right? And these two truths are the foundation of what church is to be about.

1. We come to church to be equipped. Which means we are trained and given what we need to do the work. We recognize we all come to church knowing we aren't ready or trained to live the life Jesus called us to. This truth is baked into the understanding of what church is about. Sometimes people within the church forget this. We can want people to come to church already cleaned up, preloaded with Christian traits. If we can push past this, and realize we get to journey with people as they walk this path of being equipped, then we can make becoming part of a church much more welcoming.

How have you experienced personal growth and the practice of being equipped in church?

2. And then we GO and do the work. This is just the realization that equipping has to have a greater end, purpose, to it. To just practice all the time, learn things, grow skills, and then not use them or do anything with those just is...well ridiculous. We know the ultimate end to being equipped is that there must be some movement towards finding how we can use those for a greater common good.

Have you ever stepped into a new place and you didn't feel prepared or qualified?

Were you able to overcome that? What did it take to do that?

IV Challenge.

The final Sunday of this series asks; can NCC still thrive and flourish? This conversation centers around our understanding and belief there is more to church than just an hour or so a week. If that's our understanding of church, then it's more of a social event than it is a movement of God. And that's a good place to begin. But it cannot be our only goal in being a part of the church. The purpose and ultimate goal of church is to accomplish the two points we stated earlier. **To be equipped to do good works.** And that takes a commitment to the work and also to doing something with it. It's not about bringing the perfected finished product, but to bring our uniqueness to a larger good.

What specific passion, giftedness, desire, or just curiosity to be a part of this greater good?