

WE ARE CHURCH

VALUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

WE ARE CHURCH: Why The Gathering Matters

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Acts 2:37-47:

Well, good morning again, from the fifth person with a microphone. My name is Eddie. I'm the lead teaching pastor here with Doxa. So glad to meet you if you're new. If you knew me before I got here, then it's good to see you again. If I'm new to you, come say hi. That would be great. I'd love to introduce myself to you. That'd be great.

So, hey, we're going to be in Acts chapter two. If you have your Bible, would you pull that out? It'll be on the screen if you don't have anything, but if you have a phone with an app, you can also pull that out. We're going to start in verse 37. Hey, we've been in a series called We Are Church for the last two weeks. Today's week two, and we're looking at six core values that are around the church, and really that Doxa considers are really core to the reason why we are a church in the first place. And we're going to be looking at the scriptures and what the scriptures teach about these six core values around the church. But also we're going to be looking at the opportunities for the church in light of the last 18 to 20 months. You got to hear how crazy it's been for our volunteers and how things have just changed. And we've all been stressed out and the church has opportunity, unique opportunity in that season. And so I hope you'll join us over the next few weeks.

Last week was on Jesus and why Jesus mattered. This week we're talking specifically about the gathering, why the gathering matters. And next week we'll be talking about why ownership matters. So I hope you'll join us throughout this series for this because I think it's a great, awesome catalytic moment for our church. So let me pray for us and we will get right into it. Father God, thank you for the opportunity that it is to open your word before your people. It's not lost on me the weight and the glory that you are Lord God. So I pray that I effectively yield and that your words come out of my mouth, Lord God. So I'm praying for that. But I also pray that as we do gather, something that your church has done for thousands of years, Lord, would we be reminded of the importance of the gathering. Would we be reminded of what it means

to come together as your people and worship and praise you and give you glory and be awe inspired before you Lord. I pray for those things in his name. Amen.

Okay. Let's turn our attention to what we're all doing here right now. Have you ever been to a church that's talking about what we're literally doing in this moment? It's always about, you know, something else that we need to do, right? Worship, mission, all these things, but to be talking about what you're doing right now, sitting in a what we'll call a "gathering" of the church, this is unique. It's interesting, why do we gather anyway? You know, when I was young...if you know my story, I didn't grow up a Christian. I became a Christian later in college, but I'll tell you what my idea of what a church gathering was. So I thought the way you knew you were a Christian, was that you attended a church gathering. I thought if you were a Christian, you sort of went to church, right? And I thought that that was pretty much it, except that you have to sort of dress up a little bit more than you normally would. Right? Not too much more, right? That's more a fundamentalist in my mind as a 14 year old, but you just dress up slightly nicer, right? You give some money to the church, right? You give a couple of shekels into the tin cans that pop by. Maybe you have a spiritual moment or two while you are in the church building. Maybe you have some donuts, right? Donuts, coffee. If you had all those things, you were essentially a Christian, right? Then ta da! Boom! Like, in heaven, right?

So you attend church. You know what, I feel like I need to pray. I feel like I need to pray right now. Is that, is that okay? Pastor Jeff, will you come up here? This is unique. Sorry, but I'm feeling like there's something unique going on right here. We have to pray. Can you turn this mic on? Will you pray for us?

Father, we come to you and acknowledge that your spirit is present in this room, that we are not alone. We thank you that we can always come to you and you are ready to give us anything we need at any moment. So we invite you to do your work in and through us right now. We pray for Eddie that you would fill him with your spirit to enable him to speak exactly what you want us to hear, that you give a sense here for all of us, that we are in your presence and you are here to speak. You're here to work. Lord, we just pray you give him the ability to just say anything you want him to say to us. Lord, he's in the place where you want him to be a mouth piece for you, that you would speak exactly what you want to your body.

Lord, We thank you that we get to be here. We get to be in the presence of not only your spirit, but with one another who desperately need to hear from you today. And so Lord, we thank you for the privilege that we gather together as your people, under your word with your presence. And so Lord, now in this room, would you make all of us ready and able to hear whatever it is you want us to hear? I pray, especially for Eddie Lord, that you would use him in a mighty way for our good and your glory, in Jesus name. Amen.

Um, there's something unique happening right now and I asked pastor Jeff to come up because we're in the middle of a church gathering and the church gathering is important because there are outside entities that do not like the gathering of the church. And I can sense that today. And I asked pastor Jeff to come up to uniquely preach for us because there is a resistance that doesn't want a church to gather. It does not like a church to gather because there's actual

power in a church gathering. And the power doesn't necessarily come from electricity, although we may lose that coming in. It comes from the power of the holy spirit and the holy spirit, uniquely seals the church building and allows people to flourish and to hear God's word. And what's trying to happen right now is...there's people here that need to hear the literal power of Jesus coming into their lives, and there are entities that do not want that to happen. So I want you to be aware of what's taking place here this morning.

So why does the church gather? It gathers for a number of reasons and I'm going to get into it. But the number one reason it gathers is to make much of Jesus. It gathers because Jesus Christ is Lord; because he lived the life that we should have lived; that we're all imperfect. He died a death that was meant for us. And he rose three days later and whoever would believe in him would no longer be guilty of their sin, but ultimately go into the sort of new creation that Jesus will bring in heaven with him for all eternity. So that's what the church is for. And there's a resistance against that this morning. And I feel that. So it's important for all of us to know that we must kneel before Jesus in this moment because outside entities do not want us to gather. They do not want it. They would rather us do other things on Sunday morning than be together for the power of the holy spirit to be here with us. That's what's happening. So it's important that we just all recognize the sort of gravity of what we're actually trying to do. And I say that for myself, as much as any of you. But kind of back to my story...I thought the church was something so less unique, so less awesome, so less important than it actually is. And what I thought the church was, was a building that you entered, that you go in, sort of get a few spiritual moments, give a little bit of money and then boom, I'm a Christian. And then afterwards, like at my church, you'd have like really kind of bad donuts and like fruit punch. Like that's what happened at my old Baptist church growing up.

That's what Christianity was. But when I read the book of Acts and I read Chapter Two, something so much more powerful is happening. I'm reading through this book and I'm seeing unique things happening. There are people excited. People are praying together. People are getting healed. The preaching was transformative. There were people being baptized in the passage that we just heard read. There was radical transformation happening by the power of the holy spirit. And as a new follower in my apartment in college, I felt moved by that. I felt like that was...I felt like something was powerful in that moment. The way I realized church was, was fundamentally different from what I read in the book of Acts. I was coming to realize that there was much more modern Western American thinking in my previous ideas of church than there was actually biblical truth.

But you know, the American way actually does work pretty awesome as a country. You know, I'll say it. I think it does. I think the American way is important. You get freedom, individualism, cool things, the right to choose what's best for me. But I'll say the American way to Jesus is flawed because it leaves us with a big statement that many of us have said, including me, that really undergirds our faith. And that's this statement: I can follow God my own way. I get to decide how I approach this sort of eternal God. This statement is a phrase that best explains sort of individualistic American Christianity. Now this statement, it actually birthed consumerism in American Christianity as well. And this statement that birthed consumerism in

the church, it's harmful for us. And we understand that, and it has birthed that, but it also has aided something else we'll call deconstruction. Now last week, if you were with us, you got to hear what deconstruction of the faith is. And so I'll encourage you to go back and listen to that if you want to hear it, but I'll just give you the quick definition. Deconstruction of the faith is revising and rethinking long-held beliefs in church or in Jesus, potentially leading to a deconversion from Christianity, right? So again, see last week for more information, if you're interested. American individualism tells us that we can sort of fundamentally choose the path to following God however we'd like, and that's both American consumeristic Christianity-those of us who attend. And those who are maybe saying, you know what, I'm gonna reevaluate and rethink my faith altogether. All of us believe we can fundamentally choose our way to following God. So we might say, you know that maybe the church is in the path, but maybe it's a little of Christianity, maybe it's a few YouTube videos, a couple of blogs, maybe another religion.

You know, I got an Instagram ad for Tarot cards the other day. If you are here and you work for Facebook, you missed the boat. Okay, wrong team, right? But Tarot cards, sound baths, prayer crystals, or faith crystals, whatever...there's so many different things that are faux pas, they're popular today. And these are all dabbling in these other worldviews that are not Jesus. But again, birthed out of this idea that I can follow God my own way. Which begs a really important question. How do you follow someone exactly? Like how do you follow someone? Can you actually follow someone your own way? Have you ever thought about this? Like if me and my wife were caravanning together in a car or two cars, right? We're caravanning and she says, we're going to my family's house, I know the way follow me. And let's just pretend there's no Google maps. And then I get in my car and go, you know what, that's great, but I think I'm going to follow you my own way. Now, would I get there? Probably not, right? If I'm like, she's getting on the freeway, I'm going to go the back roads. I have no idea where I'm going, but I'm gonna follow you my own way. Have you ever thought about that? How do you do that?

Following by definition requires a leader. To follow someone you need to have someone leading you. So you can't necessarily decide how you're going to follow someone. You have to follow their leading. Do you get what I'm saying? Which also begs another important question. If Jesus is a real person, which if you're a Christian, you believe that he's a real person, wouldn't he have an opinion on how we should engage him? Wouldn't he have an idea? I mean, think about my wife. I have to think about her-she probably has an opinion on how I would engage her, right? Like if I say, Hey, Babe, I know you really wanted your eye on this thing for Christmas, but I got you a new rims for my truck for Christmas, I hope you love them. Like, wouldn't she have an opinion on how I would engage her? Yes, she would. She would absolutely have an opinion. So American individualism, consumer Christianity, and deconstruction all say, I want to be an individual. But what does God say? What does God say? God's primary way for engaging us is not generally as individuals. It's as a people. Look at the verses. He says this, "I will take you as my own people. I will be your God. And then you will know that I am the Lord, your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And Jeremiah 30, "And you will be my people and I will be your God". First Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a chosen people, a people for God's own possession." Now there are many more examples of God engaging his people, how he is

created to engage us together as a people. So to experience the togetherness of the early church in Acts Two, I want you to understand that God engages us together, not as individuals, but together. Does that make sense? And hopefully, I think we'll answer this big question that's sort of on the back of our minds, as we kind of re-look at the gathering- is my idea of church more American than it is biblical? Is my idea of church more American than it is biblical?

Okay. Now the gathering, why are we gathering? Gathering is one of the primary ways God engages us together. This is the environment he provides. If we want to follow God, we've got to understand what the environment is. Now in this text, Peter is wrapping up perhaps the first sermon in the church's history. Look at verse 37 with me. It says, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart." So Peter, remember just as he's wrapping up his sermon, and people all of a sudden are feeling something, they're saying, man, I'm cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles "brothers, what shall we do?" "And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the holy spirit. And the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off everyone whom the Lord, our God calls to himself. And with many words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized. And there were added to that day, about 3000 souls." So at the center of the church gathering is sort of the recognition of the church's need for redemption from sin. That's where Jesus comes in, right? So we repent of sin in this section, Jesus, forgives our sin, and then we get baptized as an outward profession of an inward work of the holy spirit in us. That's what the church does. So fundamentally the church gathers as a reminder for our continual need for redemption. Why are you all in this room this morning? Why am I in this room? We all need a reminder that we need redemption, that we all wander away from God. We're prone to wander, prone to leave Jesus. And the gathering is a reminder that we need redemption, that we don't have it all together. You know what I notice about myself, if I've ever been in seasons where I'm out of church, I notice that my default mode isn't holiness and prayer and proselytizing and all these things, it's actually selfishness. And I get lost in myself. But gathering is a continual reminder that yeah, I'm stressed out, yeah, I'm anxious, yeah I'm depressed, but I need Jesus. And a group is such a unique way of doing this. Like have you ever been to a concert... We had the passing of the peace question was fun. It was about what's your favorite concert artists that you'd love to see live dead or alive? Like who would you want to see? If you've ever been to a concert and you've listened to music before, have you ever been in the concert and then afterwards you listen to the music it's just different. It just feels different, right? Because you saw it live, you experienced it with other people. It's just unique. And that actually does happen in the church. Our need for Jesus is highlighted as a group in ways we just don't get the full picture of when we're alone. And of course, God affects us alone, but he affects us uniquely as a people. You see in this passage, 3000 people came to meet Jesus as a result of what the holy spirit was doing in that section. It's crazy to think about. So in this next section, after the sermon hits, we actually see how the church establishes regular rhythms together as a response to what Jesus did in that message together.

So look at this, verse 42, what did the church do? And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. Okay. So the first thing they did was they devoted themselves to regular rhythms of teaching. The apostles had experience with Jesus, right? They understood him. They understood how the Old Testament sort of related to Jesus. And so they were unique people to be able to stand up and to preach and teach. And just like a concert, these teachings during the gathering had a unique effect. Look again at verse 37, it says, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart." They were cut to the heart. So the holy spirit showed up uniquely to affect them to change. Has that ever happened to you in a sermon or at a conference? It's happened to me. You know, elsewhere Paul tells Timothy, who by the way, Timothy in the Bible he's a pastor of a church, to preach the word for another reason. Look at First Timothy 4, it'll be up here. "I charge you," talking to Timothy, "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching for the time is coming. When people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." You see, the church preaches, but there are actually other sources of preaching. Many other worldviews ideologies, thought processes-they preach and they preach hard. Now they don't stand in buildings like this, but they might come in other forms. They come in forms of online media. They come in the forms of conversations with friends. They come in all sorts of forms-books, seminars, universities. So the church preaches and teaches because the world also preaches and teaches. And look at this verse 46, "day by day, attending the temple together." So they went to hear the apostles preach and teach and they did it regularly. They did it often. You know, studies show that before COVID, this may not come as a shock to you, but before COVID happened, the average person attended a church two to three Sundays a month, right? Sorry, attended the gathering of the church, two to three Sundays a month. In a post COVID world, people that still claim to attend-so not anyone who's at home now, but people that claim to attend, attend one to two times a month. So people attend less, right? They attend the gathering of the church less. But in this day they gathered all the time. They gather all the time and regularly because there were other things preaching to them. Other things were happening. There was worldviews, there was governments that were telling them what to believe. We've talked about this before, but if two hours a week is all we do in our formation for Jesus, we're going to have access to the rest of the other preaching and teaching, whether that's politics or news or whatever it is, for another 20 to 25 hours. That two hours isn't enough. Especially if we're only doing it once or twice a month. We've got to continue to fellowship with God more.

So teaching and preaching was a big reason the church gathers, but what else? Verse 42 again, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship." Now picture Eddie, 14 year old Eddie back at that church with a fruit punch in the bad donuts. I'm sitting there and the pastor in the suit, he says, all right, guys, after our gathering, we're going to have a time of fellowship. And 14 year old me who doesn't know Jesus is like, what is that? That sounds so lame. The word fellowship just makes me not want to be a part of that, right, at all, right? I just don't. I think of like weird older cartoons and like Yogi bear and just weird stuff, "for he's a jolly good fellow," like not great, right? Like that's what I think of. So I'm like, I don't want to be a

part of any sort of fellowship, right? Or maybe you're here and you're thinking, you know what? I hear what you're saying. I know you're trying to get me maybe to attend more. I understand that, but I can get this idea of fellowship with my coworkers and close friends. I can get it from them. I don't need fellowship from a church. I can get it from other people. So why not just watch the sermons at home or watch another church's sermons at home and hang out with people I like. Fair enough, alright? Pretty compelling. The word fellowship is really actually used pretty lightly in churches today. It actually gets at a deeper level of fellowship than sort of an informal social gathering. It actually does get deeper than that. See this word fellowship, the transliteration of this idea is the word koinonia, which translates fellowship here, but it actually means like sort of a deep level of participation, united by what we have in common-Jesus, right? This is what this idea of koinonia means. So that means the church gathers as a rallying moment for the church to come together, to build one another up and to remind us, to remind each other of our mission. We have a deep level of participation together, sharing in that together. It's a depth, not a width. That's what this means. Of course, COVID has made sort of gathering as a church challenging the last year and a half. We know that, and this has made online church necessary for a season. It has, right? We've all met online at some point. We've all preached online or listened online or done worship online. That's what's had to happen. We get it. And this has actually led to a lot of thought leaders in the church to think maybe online church is the primary way of the future. Maybe if we just think about only gathering online, maybe that's an idea, right? Maybe it is. But here's what we know after 18 to 20 months of online church only for a lot of people. We know that statistically people are more depressed, stressed out and anxious. I feel like a broken record saying that, but it's true. We all feel that. And we had nothing but online church for a long time and online zoom meetings for missional communities and online zoom meetings for this and that, not to mention all of our work zoom meetings as well. Lots of online time, and yet depressed, stressed out and anxious. People need contact with one another.

Now I hope I don't ruffle some feathers here with this one, but a few years ago I was walking by in the grocery store and I was looking for some ground beef, sorry vegans. And I picked up the ground beef, put it in my cart and I'm walking out. And then the cashier is scanning my items. And then she scans this and goes, Ooh, Beyond Meat Burger. How do you like that? Do you know what Beyond Meat Burger is? Beyond Beef is plant-based ground stuff. They didn't include a word because there...it's nothing. It's just stuff, right? Beyond Burger is a non-meat substitute for ground beef. Okay. That's what it is. And it's gained really a lot of popularity. And I'm sure some of you, man, some of you love this and I'm so sorry. Okay. But Beyond Beef and its cousin and the Impossible Burger has gotten, it has gotten really popular, right? It's big. So popular in fact that our friends at Burger King have decided to make the Impossible Whopper, which is fake food of fake food, right? So it's a double negative, right? You've got a fake Whopper, that's also a fake cheeseburger, right? That's what we got here. It's the Impossible Burger. Well, the Impossible Burger, what we know after a few years, it's very controversial. It's actually gotten a lot of heat for one of its main ingredients, which is soy leghemoglobin. Sounds delicious. And to make this ingredient Impossible, the company, genetically engineers a yeast bacteria to produce a protein, that's the soy leghemoglobin, right? And this gives the burger, its meaty taste and its thickness. So a bunch of guys in white lab coats took the soy leghemoglobin,

and were stirring it around a lot, really fast, trying to craft something that would look and taste like a cheeseburger. And probably after like a mazillion tries, they got it. And they're high-five'n in the lab. And now you've got a meaty substance. But what we know after a few years of this, actually we're learning that these burgers actually aren't good for our biology. Okay. Our bodies are not taking well to these. We know that this burger now contains a high level of inflammation-inducing oils, and we know, aid the growth of certain cancers, including soybean oil certainly, but also expeller pressed canola oil, which there's a whole rabbit hole with that one, right? But what we're learning is that canola oil goes rancid really quickly. So in order for us to eat it, they have to bleach it so you can't taste that it's rotten. So they deodorize the canola oil to make the Impossible Burger. So you don't know you're eating rancid oil, which is delicious. Yum. Right?

So here's my really farfetched point. I think online church is the Impossible Burger of Christianity. Okay? Hear me out. It's another way that humankind has tried to improve on God's creation, right? It's another way humankind has tried try to improve on what God has already made good. Also it could just be fine for a season or as a supplement to an otherwise healthy rhythm or diet. It's perfectly fine for that. But long-term we're finding out that it's not good for us in isolation. If we only partake of online church, we know that long-term, it is not healthy for people because God says his first negative statement over all of creation and it's this, "it is not good for man to be alone." That's what he says. The church needs koinonia. It absolutely has to have koinonia. We were created by God for a unique mission and purpose. And when we're united to that in fellowship, in this deep connected people, a deep level participation and what we have in common, then we can help people learn the ways of Jesus.

If you've ever been a personal trainer, or if you've ever been on a team sport you know that, take it from someone who's retired from sports, right, there are things you do with a trainer or with a team that you will never do on your own. If you've ever tried to go to the gym, right, you get into the gym and you're like, ah, I don't think I'm going to finish this. Let's cut this workout short. Let's grab a smoothie. This is enough, right? Where's the nearest Jamba Juice. There's this old phrase that maybe you've heard it's this- to go fast you go alone. But to go far, you go together. That's what the church is about when it comes to koinonia.

What else does the church do? Why else does it gather? Verse 42 again, "they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship and to the breaking of bread." Such a symbol of fellowship when you come together and you eat a good meal. So much of our lives centers around big meals, Thanksgiving, birthdays. There's these big celebratory moments where we all sort of come together and try to enjoy each other's presence. And that's what he's talking about here. The church gathers together to share meals together. That's why Missional Communities, which are smaller gatherings as a part of this large gathering, they gather for meals together because meals are so important. Now certainly when the text here says, "to the breaking of bread," it includes these larger fellowship meals, but it almost certainly includes the Lord's supper or communion together. So Jesus before he was executed was in an upper room, eating the Passover meal and he takes the bread and the wine and he says, this is my body and my blood that will be shed for you. Take this in remembrance of me. So the church here gathers

together to take communion with one another. You can take communion alone, of course. But you can take it together as Jesus instructed us to, or as the church had done for all the last 2000 years, it's important. So the church then, why do we gather for the Passover meal, or for the communion rather? The church gathers to remind ourselves of the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection that Jesus went on our behalf. That's what communion is. And that's why the church takes it together.

What else does the church do together? Well, the church prays. Verse 42, "and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship and the breaking of bread and the prayers." Now listen, you heard me invite pastor Jeff up here to pray because I felt like there was a big moment here that needed to be prayed over. And pastor Jeff's been a great leader here and one of our elders here at Doxa. So I wanted him to pray for us. Prayer is incredibly important. It's so important that it needs its own sermon in the series. And so we're going to get into that in a few weeks, but I'll just say for now, prayer is one of the primary ways that we communicate to God. We speak to him and he speaks to us. Okay? And so the church gathers to pray together so God can speak to us together.

What else does the church do? Maybe you're running through the list in your head, right? Verse 47, "praising God and having favor with all the people." When do we praise God here at the gathering? Typically during our worship time through song, right, where we sing. So music, worship music, as we play, as we're worshiping God through song, that should communicate and express a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God. That's what it should do. It should lift him up. That's why we sing- a sense of awe and wonder. Now I'll be honest with you. When 14 year old Eddie at that church, worship music, the time of worship together felt a little boring, felt a little routine. Maybe some of you young ones feel that too. But I also know that maybe some of you older ones feel the same way, right? But really Doxa is not trying to force anybody to sing. We're not trying to force you to sing. We're actually just trying to provide an environment to facilitate your worship through song. It's all we're trying to do. So if worshiping through song communicates and expresses a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God, ask yourself this question. Do you feel a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God? Do you feel that? Then why not sing? Just being curious. This is important because Jesus says out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. So what's in our hearts? Is it a compelling by God, by the power of the holy spirit to feel the sense of awe and wonder for who God is in this moment or is it not? We have to ask that question. What's in our heart?

Now we'll wrap up with this. What do we miss when we don't gather? And what do we ultimately gain if we do? I think that's probably the question we all probably want to get answered here. Verse 43 in our text, "after all that awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles." Verse 44, "and all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day attending temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts." Now, I don't know about you, but I don't see a lot of that type of people around, outside of even maybe a church. What you miss when you don't gather is you miss being a part

of this distinct community, one that's living in the world, but differently from the world. It's doing its best to point people towards the solution for all their problems, which we believe is Jesus. There's a shared experience of being a part of this church. You know, my friends in the military say, man, I have lots of friends, but the people I served with overseas, that relationship is different because we were in the trenches together. We experienced things differently than I've experienced with other people. And the same is true for a church. I've lots of friends, I mean, the people I'm in the church with I do life with them. I go deep with them. I share my sin, my brokenness with them. There's a depth of our relationship together. You get to be a part of that. Now, maybe someone would say, and maybe some of us in here, that's definitely okay, no, I hear you but the gathering, it's just not for me. I think another way is best. I've kind of concocted another way to go about this. But again, you can't follow God to a place he hasn't gone. His plan was always communal before it was individual. And God hasn't called any of us into isolation. He called us to be together, all tribes, tongues and nations worshipping Jesus together. So ask yourself is my faith more American than it is biblical.

So we've gotten through a bunch of reasons of what the church does, but again, let's do another reminder. Why does the church gather? The church gathers to make much of Jesus. We're gathered here today to lift Jesus up. And for those of us who don't know him to come into his midst and become a follower and believer of this guy, Jesus. And just who is Jesus? I'll reiterate it again. Jesus Christ was a man born of a virgin, sent into the world by God himself, knowing full well that humanity has wandered away from God. We are all sinners. Is anyone here perfect? No, right? I don't even need to answer. We all mess up. Right? And so the wages for that is ultimately death. That's why we die. And so Jesus comes into the world, lives a perfect life, and then is executed by people, us, because he was so perfect. And he, because he was so perfect, he rose from death three days later. He conquers death proclaiming that anyone who had placed their faith in me, my death will count for theirs. And then they will live for eternity because of what I've done. That's Jesus. And then he ascends into heaven and he says, one day I'm coming back and I'll come back to judge the living. I'll come back to judge the dead, but ultimately I'm coming back to bring a renewed kingdom, a renewed creation. That would be free of sickness, free of death, free of destruction. And I would bring that back. That is my ultimate goal. So much so that he says, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So what does Jesus do? He gives the church its vision statement. That one day I am coming back to redeem, renew, restore everything back to the way it was supposed to be. You know, there's a part in Second Corinthians 5 where Paul says that you then are ambassadors for Christ. What's an ambassador? An ambassador is someone who represents a different world, a different worldview, a different perspective, right? A different country, different laws, different priorities. We all are ambassadors for Christ. We all represent different worldviews, different mission, different ruler, different king. So the church then if it's anything is a heavenly embassy. This building right here, more importantly, the people in this building right here represents a kingdom rule in the midst of downtown Bellevue, where we love the people outside. All of my family is out there. These people are great. We're here for them. And we represent a kingdom, a God who is different fundamentally from what the world thinks. And that doesn't

mean we're at war- that's for God to handle. What we want as ambassadors is to go out and to represent Jesus well, and to get other people back in here with us so then we can then gather and go back out into the world. We are a heavenly embassy with a different king, a different rule that represents Jesus here in downtown Bellevue and eventually in Redmond. That's what the church fathers for. So church, what is the church gathered for on a Sunday? It gathers for Jesus. It gathers because Jesus is important. That's why we gather.

Does that feel good? Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, I can tell, I can just feel the palpable, spiritual aggression that's going on in this room. There is more, there was a war going on, Lord, for souls. So Lord Jesus, I do pray that you would give us a hedge of protection, that this church building would be represented well, that these people that represent the church of Doxa that they'd have a hedge of protection around them, that they can go out into the world and be protected by the power of the holy spirit as they share the gospel for you. Lord God, I pray as we figure out what the gathering means together, that we would all understand that we don't just go to church, but we are the church and we have an important role to play and that's to make much of you. In his name, Amen.