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**Series: People in Community**  
**Message: The Hidden Glory of the Church**

**Transcribed Message**  
**August 23, 2020**  
**1 Timothy 3:14-16**

Farther back than I can remember, every fall we have for many, many years stepped out of whatever series we were in. If we weren't in a series, we didn't begin a new one until we stepped into a relaunch of our ministry year. Every year at this time, we have stepped back and we have looked at what our goals are as a church, what we value, what our core values are, what it is that we believe God is calling us to do in that coming year. This year really isn't any different from that except that about four years ago we started doing a little fall series called "People of..." In 2017 we started that and we said we want to be People of the Book. We want to be known not just as people who believe the Bible, but we want to be people who are stepping into the Word of God and making it a part of our life every day. We said in 2018 that we want to be People of the Spirit. It simply follows that if we're People of the Word, we're going to be people who are living life in submission to the Spirit of God. In 2019 we did People on a Mission. This morning in 2020, we're going to start off this fall little miniseries by looking at People in Community. If you want to know what 2021 will be, you just have to come back next year and see what that is. I actually selected this theme People in Community pre-pandemic. Back in January, I just felt like this was the theme that we needed to step into this year. People in Community. Now granted, for the last five months or more community has looked a lot different than we probably anticipated or I anticipated in January. But at the same time, it seems to me it gives us kind of a fresh opportunity to step in and look a little bit differently than we might have otherwise at what this idea of community is all about.

This morning, here's what we want to do. God has left the church on this earth to represent and to reveal His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we're here. We're here to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Now as you think about that, it doesn't take too long to realize that this assignment is a hugely important one. This assignment is

nothing less than a staggering one. It is that because of the stated fact that it is God's intention and purpose that the church, you and me, are the central driving force of what He wants to do in our world in between His ascension and His coming again. Think about that for a minute. Think about the fact that it's not the United Nations. It's not the WHO. It is not the White House. It is not Congress. It is not the Supreme Court. It is not our governor, or our legislature, or our mayor, or our city Council. It isn't any or all of those things combined that God intends to do His central work in and through in these years until Jesus returns. It's us. We're the ones that get to represent and reveal to the world who Jesus is. We are, as the people of God, God's chosen instrument. The church. The church is God's chosen instrument.

Tucked away in this little book of 1 Timothy in this third chapter we're just going to zero in on verses 14 through 16. Paul puts before us what I think is simply the hidden glory of the church. It's the hidden glory of the church. now I don't know what comes to mind when you hear the word "church". For some of you it's a very positive thing. When you hear the word "church", very positive thoughts come to your mind. For others of you, it might be that very negative thoughts come to your mind. In fact, you might be in a church recovery program right now. Your thoughts about the church have been so badly damaged or hurt. I don't know when it is that you have come to understand what the church is supposed to be, if that was at a very young age or if that came later in life. Some people when they hear the word "church" immediately think of the building. Some people think of people. Here's what we do know. Out of all of those things that have shaped us and all of those things that have caused us to see what this word church looks like in our own individual experience, I just want to come back and say again that on the basis of the Word of God, it is the church that is central to the purposes of God in the world.

That is worth meditating on for a minute. The church. That's us. Central primary, the focal point of God the Creator and sustainer of all things to His purposes, to His will, to what He wants to see happen in this world. 1 Timothy is a great little book to help us. I say that because it's really all about the church. When you read the book of 1 Timothy, he is writing to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. He's writing to Timothy and he's basically going to say Timothy, here are some foundational truths that I want you as a

young pastor to know about with regard to the church and how the church is to be the church.

So he starts off in verse 14 and again this is not surprisingly a personal kind of a note. Verse 14: "I hope to come to you soon but I'm writing these things to you." He is in effect writing pastor to pastor. At this point, Paul has almost certainly been released from his first imprisonment. Paul found himself imprisoned more than once. He's been released from prison and he is writing to this young pastor Timothy at the church of Ephesus. He's basically saying these are the things that I want you to get a hold of and understand as foundational to the church. Timothy had been sent to Ephesus. Paul, on his second missionary journey, saw the Spirit of God raise up a group of believers in Ephesus and the church was formed there. Then you remember in that powerful farewell in Acts chapter 20, which is probably about five years before this book was written. In Acts 20, Paul meets with the elders of the church at Ephesus out there before he gets on the ship and they have a very emotional farewell together. Paul just pours out his heart to them. That's the church that Timothy is pastoring here. He revisited this church on the third missionary journey and spent a couple years with them. Paul has a deep relationship with this group of believers and I'm sure he has a deep love for them and they for him. So now, five years after he said goodbye, thinking that he might see them at some point again, but it never turned out that way far as we know.

There are now some issues in the church and so Paul writes to Timothy. He is going to take on matters of public worship. He is going to talk about things related to the role of women in the church and about leadership and the key elements that go into choosing leaders. 1 Timothy is in effect a how-to manual for a young pastor to be reading as he steps into the issues that face his church. So it's first of all Paul writing as a mentor. He's writing as a mentor. He's saying listen, these are things that I want you to get a hold of as you think in terms of your ministry there in the church. But he is not just writing as a mentor.

He's also secondly writing as a friend. He is writing as a friend. He's writing pastor to pastor, man-to-man, friend to friend, and he just opens his heart a little bit. As you look at verses 14 and 15 and you see all of the references to "you" those are actually singular use. They're directed specifically to Timothy. Obviously the word "you"

can mean you, all of you, collectively. In this case, he means Timothy, these are things I'm writing to you with an application to all of us. So we get to take part in this as this mentor and friend write this letter. He wants of course at some point to reconnect with Timothy, but as I said that likely didn't happen. So there's that personal note.

The second thing I want you to see is there's a very clear purpose statement. In verse 15 he says: "If I delay you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth." Now you can just mark down verse 15 as the key verse of this whole book. It's kind of neat when you're studying your Bible and you have a book where the key verse just jumps off the page. It's like in Romans with Romans 1:16 – For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God into salvation. Paul builds his whole letter to the Roman believers around that theme and around that verse. That's what you have here in verse 15. This is why he's writing. I hope to come to you so that I am writing these things to you so that if I delay (and he was delayed; he never made it) you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God which is the church of the living God. So he's going to tell us who the church is and what the church is supposed to be doing.

When he says, "If I delay that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God," he's not telling us how to behave in church on Sunday morning. It's not going to be quite that specific. Our kids didn't have the advantage of Kids Break. When we went to our first church in Kansas our kids did not have the advantage of being in a church where there was a nursery and Kids Break. Every Sunday morning Bonnie would bring a small suitcase with her. In that case there were things to entertain four children for the whole length of the service on the back row. Paul is not talking about behavior in that way. If you're a little bit older, maybe around my age, at some point your parents probably said we don't behave that way at church. Do parents still say that? It seemed like it was almost a phrase that was generational because there were certain things that you did and didn't do in a church building. When I was growing up there were just things you didn't do in a church building because that was God's church and His building. We heard that probably more often. We don't do that at church. We don't do that in the church. He's not talking about that here. He's going to be talking about something else. How we behave in a different way.

Let's look at what it is that he has in mind when he says that. The first thing I want you to see is he is going to tell us who the church is. the church is the household of God. the church is the household of God. I want you to see that in a couple of different ways. The church is the household of God. The church by any way of understanding that is first of all about people. The church is about people and not simply a building. Even though this word for household here is the word *oikos* and can be understood by the word building, that surely is not what Paul has in mind here. There isn't any reference at all of the New Testament to the church as being a physical building. There isn't any reference in the New Testament where the word "church" is tied to a physical structure. That didn't actually come until the fourth century. It wasn't until the fourth century that the people began to meet and assemble in a building that they referenced as the church. It doesn't mean God is against people meeting in a building. Obviously the whole history of God's people was that. They met in the tabernacle. They met in the temple. They met in synagogues. So it's just that when he says this matter of household, which could be understood as building, but almost certainly is simply saying you are the people of God. The household of God is us. It's not to be understood as a place.

The second thing that you draw from that is then about being in a family. Household speaks of the family. You can drive by our house and say that's the Tschettlers. You could mean by that that is our home but you also almost certainly could mean that's where the household is where they live as a family. That's what he has in view here. That says to us that being a part of the household of God is not just a reference to people, it's a reference to people in a family. That means that we are not to be going it alone. We're to understand this relationship that we have with each other. We are a part of God's family. God is our Father. We're related to each other.

I think it was about a month ago and the conversation wasn't specific to anything related to the church or to spiritual things as I remember, but one of my five-year-old granddaughters looked at her mom and said we're sisters in Christ. We both were just a little bit surprised that she just in that spontaneous moment looked up at her mom and said that. I don't even know that this child has stepped into the full understanding of the gospel. But she already knew that there was something about church that represented

people that were part of a family so she could look at her mom and with great delight say we're sisters in Christ. That simply is what Paul is saying here. We are a family.

The question isn't do we like each other. The question is do we love each other. Are we willing to obey the command to literally step into loving each other the way that we are called upon to do? It's not that we are like a family. I like the fact that the Spirit of God is very specific. He doesn't say you're like a family. He says you are a family. You're connected to each other in the same way that you are connected as a family. We're not a collection of people who meet occasionally in this building and call ourselves Covenant Community Church. We are literally a spiritually connected family by shared faith in Jesus Christ. Just as you're born into the human race and into a human family, so too the moment of faith you enter into the household of God which is a spiritual family.

Every so often somebody will say I don't need the church. I've got Jesus and I've got my Bible and I'm good. I don't need that family. Think about that for a minute. We're born into the human race physically and we're born into a family. On those sad occasions when someone is born physically into the human race and they are not born into a physical family, we look at that with sadness. We grieve over that. We know there's pain ahead for anybody who doesn't have a physical family to be loved and cared for. So my response to the person who says I really don't need that local church. I'm born spiritually into God's family and I'm a part of the universal church. That's good enough for me. I've got Jesus and I've got my Bible and I'm fine. I would say to that person as I would say to the person who's born into the human race, you don't have to have a physical family, but who would want to choose not to have a physical family? He tells us right away that we are people in this household of God. It is a family. Relationships are the key. We are committed to each other in that way.

Now I know many of you are not going to agree with this well thought-out idea that I have, but you know a part of the pandemic is that we're having to social distance now. A lot of the rows are taken. One of the rows that was taken was yours. One of the seats that was taken was your seat. I think in this pandemic it is a great time for Covenant South to move over and meet people in Covenant North, and for Covenant North to move over and meet some folks over here on Covenant South and maybe stop

a Sunday or two in Midtown Covenant and get to know some of the Midtown folks. Then maybe some of the Balconites can come down and join the non-balconites. We can mix it up a little bit. Don't you think that's a great idea? Let's have a large huge round of applause. I know none of you are going to do it but that's ok. We are a spiritual family connected to each other through Christ.

Look at what he says the church is to do. That's who we are. What are we supposed to do? He says we as a church are to be upholding the truth. The last part of verse 15: "...which is the church of the living God a pillar and buttress of the truth." The first thing I want you to see is the church is alive and powerful. The church is alive and it's powerful. We sang about some of that stuff this morning. It is good to lift our voices and to acknowledge the truth that we serve this God who is alive and who's powerful. We're the church, he said, of the living God. Actually the article is that even before that phrase it's living God's church. It doesn't make good English but that's literally the wording that he says here. The church is not so much an organization. It is an organization. It has to be organized to function according to the New Testament pattern. But it clearly is a living organism and in this immediate context as these 1<sup>st</sup> century believers in Ephesus get this letter that Timothy shares with them.

Trust me. When he talks about this imagery of the living God, it had to be Paul taking something of a swipe at the culture in which these Christians found themselves living. It wasn't true just of Ephesus but many of these 1<sup>st</sup> century cities where God planted these churches were filled with idolatry. Physical idols all over the place. In Acts 17 they actually had an idol that they didn't name in case they missed any of the idols. They had an idol to the unknown God. In Ephesus you know that the idol Diana was the center of the whole culture of the city. so I got a feeling that when he says this, it's like Paul is taking a swipe at these lifeless, dead idols that the city of Ephesus had given themselves over to. It's like he says your idols are dead but our God is alive. Our God is living. You're caught up in this dead ritual and this dead formality. We come together as the people of God, as the family of God. We come together so that we can gather around and lift up the name of the living God. That's what we are about. That's what we do. We're the assembly of, we're the church, we're the called out ones who gather in the presence of the living God.

John Stott says it this way: “In our worship we bow down before a living God, the living God. Through the reading and the exposition of His Word we hear His voice addressing us.” Isn’t that great? “We read and we hear the Word and it’s the voice of God speaking His truth into our life. We meet Him at His table when He makes Himself known to us. Through the breaking of bread and our fellowship with each other, He loves us and our witness becomes bolder and more urgent. Indeed, unbelievers coming in may confess that God is really among you.” My friend, the church is most glorious and alive and vibrant when we come together as the people of God, as the family of God, and when we come with the realization and the focus that we’re here to focus on the living God of the universe. That’s powerful stuff. When we praise Him and sing and pray and listen in that way. God has blessed us with his presence.

Secondly, the church isn’t just alive and powerful. He says secondly, the church must know the truth. The church must know the truth. It’s the church of the living God. A pillar and buttress of the truth. Again, pillar and buttress is not what the church is in this case. It is what’s the church is doing. And what is the church doing? The church has to know the truth, and that truth centers around this divine revelation that God has given to us. It is a revelation to us of the living God that He is alive, that He is sovereign, that He is working out His purposes even in the midst of the pandemic. There isn’t anything that God has been thwarted from doing by all the craziness going on around us. He is still doing everything that He intended to do. He may be doing it in a different way than we expected but he’s doing it.

We learn the truth about God. We learn the truth about ourselves. How are you going to know the truth about yourself if you’re not stepping into this revelation on a regular basis every day? God wants to reveal His truth about Himself. He wants to reveal His truth about you. He wants to reveal truth about what’s right and what’s wrong. Folks, we’re living in crazy times. If your feet aren’t anchored to this truth, how are you going to be discerning about all the voices, about all the things that you’re hearing, about all of these different things? You won’t know. You’ll be tossed around by every wind of doctrine and thought that comes our way, cloaked at times in religious or spiritual language. It is calling upon us to know the truth so that when we hear something, we say where does it say that in the Bible? What is the basis of what you’re



putting forward there? Can you show me from God's Word why you're saying those things? And if you can't, and if they can't, then your discernment is on high alert because the church must know the truth about why we're here, how it is that we can have a relationship with this incredible living God.

In contrast Satan, the sworn enemy of our soul who is a killer and a deceiver and a hater of all things good and godly, hates God. He hates Jesus. He hates the truth. He hates the church. He hates you and he wants to kill you. He wants to destroy you. He wants to deceive you. If you don't know the truth of who you are in Christ, then you are going to be a victim of his deception and destruction. He makes it so clear to us here. Our goal is that we would be in and know this truth.

Look at the pictures that he uses. The church is a pillar and a buttress. A pillar and a buttress. Again, when Paul specifically speaks of the church as a pillar, if you're sitting there in Ephesus hearing Timothy share this letter, your mind must have immediately gone to downtown Ephesus. In downtown Ephesus was the temple to Diana. 450 feet long. 250 feet wide. 60 feet high. Held up by 127 pillars. You see how the Holy Spirit steps in to and contextualizes the Word of God as he writes to these folks in Ephesus. He brings into Paul's mind this imagery that Paul knew very well. He had spent a lot of time in Ephesus. He puts this beautiful picture in there and says this is what you people are to be. As the people of God, you are to be like the pillars holding up the roof. You're to be putting it on display in a majestic way. Go to the Washington DC. There's a lot of pillars. There's a lot of buildings that have pillars. Those pillars speak of majesty. They're not just holding a building up. They're putting that building on display. They're saying look at the beauty and majesty and the glory of this building. Do you see the connection that he's saying to us as the people of God, as the family of God? That's what we're to be doing in this world – unashamedly, boldly bringing this life changing message to a weary and lost world because we are pillars and like a foundation of this truth beneath our feet.

He ends in verse 16 with the profession of faith. "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." Most Bible scholars and teachers are convinced that this was a 1<sup>st</sup> century hymn. This was

literally a song that was sung. I wondered this morning instead of doing an exposition of this verse if I might just sing it to you. Okay, we'll go with the exposition. In this one verse, which was literally a song, it would be cool to know the tune and the melody of the song that they sang. But we have the central truth and the heart of the gospel put on display so beautifully in this one verse. In the description that is given to us at the beginning of verse 16, every word of this description is weighty and important. He says, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness." It's great. He starts off by telling us it's great. It is of supreme importance. If you get this right, you have a good chance of getting everything else right. If you get this wrong, you will surely get everything else wrong. That's what he means when he says that it is of supreme importance.

He says it's a mystery. It's not mysterious. It's not a riddle. It's not something that is a puzzle, that we have to try to figure out and understand. As you know, the word "mystery" in the New Testament speaks of something that is not known apart from divine revelation. When he says it is this great mystery, the only way we're going to step into the truth of this mystery is through the Word of God and the Spirit of God making it known to us by divine revelation. It's not being uncovered by human reason. That's why the Bible is unlike any book that you pick up. That's why the Bible does something to your soul that nothing else can do. Why? Because it's the revelation of God Himself to us. It's God's truth, His will, His purpose, His plan, His desires, His heart – all given to us in this Word. That's what He wants to see here. This is the mind of God. This is the will of God. Why would you not want to read and know the mind of God and the will of God every day of your life? Why would you not want that truth washing over your soul every day of your life? Why would you not want it cleansing your mind and clearing the path every day? That's exactly his intention. Great is the mystery of godliness.

If you look over in the fourth chapter, you see the same word "godliness" used a couple of times. Have nothing to do, he says in verse 7 of chapter 4, with irreverent silliness. Rather train yourself for godliness, for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also the life to come. That's interesting to me. Great is the mystery of godliness. When you step into the truth of godliness, which the word can be understood as wholeness. The idea is that of maturity and you're growing in Christ. Look at what he says in that 8<sup>th</sup> verse. This

fascinates me. He says this mystery of godliness is of value that holds promise in the present life. We get that, but then he also says for the life to come. So there's something impactful about growth in godliness and maturing in our walk with God that doesn't just equip us for life here but somehow has an impact on life forever. That's an interesting thought. There's more that can be done there.

Let's look then at this matter that he puts before us by way of these doctrinal statements. There are six statements here. We'll just read through them. They're self-explanatory. You can literally take each one and do a whole morning of exposition. You have a contrast between earthly and heavenly, between what's visible and what's invisible. Let's look. He says all of this is about Jesus because that's who we as a church and the people of God are here with regard to the central purpose of God to lift up as the pillar and magnify and glorify and reveal and represent Jesus. He says He was revealed in the flesh. That's the incarnation. The eternal Son. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He always was the eternal Son. He stepped in to human history and became a man. He didn't detract an inch from His deity but He added to His deity humanity. We have the fact that He is revealed. Jesus became a man.

Secondly, He was vindicated in the Spirit which is a demonstration that He's the Son of God. The Spirit vindicated that this is the Son of God. At the baptism – This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. All of Jesus's miracles were the vindication of the Spirit. His teaching was the vindication of God's Spirit. This is the unique God-man. Everybody looked at Him and they thought this was the kid who grew up in Nazareth. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Who is this guy? He is the son of Joseph and Mary. Yeah, but the vindication of the Spirit of God is on Him and He did things that only God could do.

Thirdly, He was beheld by angels. That was an exultation. All through Jesus's life, it's interesting there are points at which the angels were involved. At His announcement, at His birth, at His temptation, in the garden as He prayed, at the resurrection, at the ascension. You see angels involved in the life of our Lord, exalting Him.

He was preached among the nations. That's the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus would say to the apostles go into all the world and preach the gospel. Proclaim who it is – Jesus. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Acts 4:12. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved. It's all wrapped up in Jesus.

Then lastly, He's taken up in glory. He's taken up in glory. that's the ascension. You know what, my friends? One day He's coming back. One day He's coming back. He's going to return visibly, bodily, powerfully, majestically, authoritatively. Every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess. But in between, God has left you and me as the church of the living God on this earth to represent and to lift up and to reveal this Savior our Lord Jesus. It is an awesome opportunity, an assignment that He has given to us because the very central purposes of God in our world today are being worked out in your life. If you are submitting yourself day-to-day to the Lordship of Christ, the central purposes of God are being worked out in and through you.

What do we take away? It is pretty simple at this point. Just a couple of questions really. Are you committed to the local church? Are you committed to the local church? As I said at the beginning, the pandemic has changed a lot of things. We're going to step in to that a little bit more next week and the week after that, Lord willing, but there are some things that can't change and that is our commitment to the local church. With that is the question: do you love the church? The church is imperfect. The church has all kinds of shortcomings. We miss it regularly, but it is the church of the living God. It is that in which the central purposes of God are being worked out and realized in this world. Jesus gave His life for the church.

What is it that we are going to do? You know, there is somewhat of a sad note on which I end because there's another letter to this church that got written sometime after this, some 30 years or so after, the author of that letter to the church in Ephesus was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He said to them: "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my namesake, and you have no

grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." We close this morning by just asking ourselves the question: has my love for the church grown cold? Are we with those that the church of Ephesus that count ourselves as believers? We pride ourselves that we're people of the book, people of the Spirit, people on a mission. Is our heart passionate for the things that God loves? It's what He calls us to do.

If you're here this morning and you've never put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, this is a great opportunity for you this morning to join this church of the living God, not the church that's called Covenant Community Church, but literally the church of the living God. By faith in Christ, apart from any human merit or human works, God gives to us the gift of eternal life. If you have not ever put your trust in Christ alone as your Savior, I would invite you to do that this morning right in these closing moments simply by agreeing with God that that you have sinned, as all of us have, and that you have fallen short of the glory of God, and agreeing that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done. When we enter into that point of belief and faith, God gives to us eternal life.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the church. Thank You for this church. Thank You for these people. Thank You for their love for You. Father, may our love grow white hot passionate. As we press into this new year of ministry, we pray that we would assure people and rise to this wonderful and glorious occasion of representing You well to this world and in this community that You have placed us. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.