

For Good: For the Church
by senior pastor Tom Harrison

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I hope you are using your sermon journals or doing your daily readings on our Asbury app. Church buildings and denominations exist, but the church is not about bricks and mortar – the church is about people. Jesus' "bride" isn't a building; it's us. The song, "*I am the church – you are the church – we are the church together*" has it right. With all our limitations and flaws, the church is doing many amazing things around the world. Paul wrote some letters to churches and people in his day. They had issues, too, because people always have problems. This week's readings reflect on some of the joys and concerns the Apostle Paul shared with the churches he pastored. He's furious with the Galatians (short time to say hello and a long time to say goodbye) and exuberant with the Philippians.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (pew Bible #1818)

WHY do we need the church?

1.) **We need COMPANIONSHIP.** In Genesis 1, "good" is mentioned 6x, until it climaxes with "it was VERY good." The first "not good" appears in 2:18: "It is NOT good for the man to be alone." We all have family, but many of us are separated from our biological family by death or by distance – whether geographic or emotional/spiritual. The church can be "Family." The church is intended to be, as The Apostles Creed states, "the communion of saints." Paul was so grateful that the Ephesians not only loved God, but that they loved each other. We don't have to be married to have companionship, and just because someone is married doesn't mean that they have companionship. What we yearn for is truly "intimacy." People confuse intimacy with sex.

We all need to be loved. Our son, Josh, became a father on April 11th to Jack Thomas Harrison (**picture**). This little boy will get lots of love. But

suppose this baby was just laid in a crib and left alone in a far room except for feeding time. Once fed, he was put back in the empty room. That would be abuse! No child deserves such treatment – no adult with a soul would allow that to happen. Are children, students and adults any different than an infant? We all need love, acceptance and forgiveness. Some more than others, but we all need it.

The way the New Testament addresses our need is through a Greek word: **KOINONIA** (symbol of the heart). “Koinonia” is about having companionship or, in New Testament terms, “fellowship” or “community.” It’s about love – but not about eros. We don’t have to be married to have fellowship (i.e. Jesus, Paul). Koinonia are people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to care for one another. The NT commands us to accept one another, to admonish, to be compassionate, to encourage, live in harmony, to honor, to show hospitality and to be kind to one another. It’s about loving one another.

2.) **We need REDEMPTION.** Our redemption comes through Jesus Christ because of His Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension & outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the reasons I love going to Israel so much – on one day we go to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity and end up going to the Garden Tomb, which lends to our senses what it was like for Jesus to have been crucified, dead, buried and raised from the dead. God was not an abstract idea or an unapproachable Being, but He did the unthinkable – He went from the Great Throne of Heaven to a manger in Bethlehem. He grew up in a backwater Judean town, Nazareth (“can anything good come from there?” asked Nathanael, who became a disciple). He humbled himself and became a human being. He experienced life as we do. He had a human family, He learned hard work, He felt hunger and thirst. He laughed and He cried. He was celebrated and loved. He was also berated, betrayed and beaten.

We need redemption because we are all lost. Some of us are lost like the Prodigal Son – who left home and lifted in outward ways of disobedience. Others are like the Elder Brother – who stayed home and hated his brother. The conclusion of the New Testament is that ALL of

us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and intent for us.

Therefore, we all need redemption.

The way the New Testament addresses our need for redemption is through a Greek word: **KERYGMA** (symbol of the Bible). This means the proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel. If you read in our daily readings this week Galatians 1, you saw where Paul was furious with the Galatians because they had neglected the gospel to become like the Elder Brother – “follow the rules” + Christ. He insisted that the Good News is about accepting Christ + living in relationship with Him. If we are in right relationship w God, we will want to be obedient to His word; but we are not redeemed by saving ourselves.

3.) We need **PURPOSE**. We were created for contribution, service, participation and meaning. We have something meaningful and important to give and to share. Rabbi Kushner quote...***I suppose the happiest people you know are the ones who work at being kind, helpful and reliable, and happiness sneaks into their lives while they are busy doing those things. It is a by-product not a primary goal.*** The New Testament addresses our need with a Greek word: **DIAKONIA**. This is our great opportunity to share light/life with others in Jesus' Name. This means that we serve. Jesus was very strong in His service: *“The son of man did not come to be served but to serve.”* His ministry was one of compassion to the “sheep w/o a shepherd.” His service also led him to confront the powers of darkness. He stood against the Devil. He spoke up about the religious abuses. He overturned the money changers table in the Temple. He stared down Pontius Pilate and exposed that He could see behind the Governor's mask.

I see these things all the time around here. Just last Sunday when we celebrated the Golden Anniversaries. I think of the service which is done by those who have served our graduating seniors over the years – nursery works, children's teachers, VBS leaders, small group leaders, SBM leaders, camps, music, etc. Huge “diakonia” ministry. Staff do some of this, but we're here primarily to equip you to find your place & purpose in ministry.

The church is very diverse – our commonality = Jesus. We are glued together. Some people won't get married bec. they can't find the perfect mate. Some people don't participate in the ministry of the church because they don't like someone or because somebody did something which hurt them. I'm not disputing either of those. The church is full of people who we might not pick. But it's very easy to become passive/aggressive. People don't like certain things so they disengage. But if we disengage from the church we disengage from Christ.

The church doesn't "just happen." It takes intentionality and commitment. It takes a big picture view. People ARE going to disappoint you, let you down, hurt your feelings – but to be honest, you are going to do that to some others, too. You can be insensitive, judgmental, lazy, and selfish, too. Some people only take – they won't volunteer their time, share their talents or make financial contributions. We usually get out of life what we put into it. Asbury has all kinds of way for you to experience koinonia, kerygma and diakonia. We cannot do it. Commitment/Engagement. Mission trips. Not a cruise liner.

We are here to help others follow Jesus.

As we go through the Communion liturgy this a.m. I want you to watch for these 3 concepts of "Koinonia" (Fellowship), "Kerygma" (the proclamation of the Good News of Redemption through Jesus Christ) and "Diakonia." Part of the reason we receive communion is to remind us of who we are, not just as individuals, but as members of the Body of Christ.