

Westfield Sermon notes

Title: What is Church

Readings: Acts 2:42

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This sermon can be found at: <http://www.westfieldurc.org/worship/sermons/>

Sermon Notes / Comments:

- Over the last few months we have been looking at Leading our church into growth. Since Sheila, Glynis and myself went on the course in Derby
- We have been looking at 4 areas of growth; Growth in: numbers, Love for God, service to our community & Love and support within the fellowship.
- At the start of these we need to ask ourselves some questions, the first is that if we want to see the church to grow in these four areas. We need to first understand what church is. What are we talking about when we say church.
- If we asked 100 different people what church is, we'd get 10 answers.
- We need to know what WE mean by church.
- Secondly once we understand what church is, we need to decide whether these are the right things to be looking at growing.
- Which will hopefully be fun and interesting, but will also help us grow in our own faith. If we learn what it is that the church has to do and grow in, this will be true of us as individuals too, as people of the church (as Christians).
- Church and Christian are very intertwined / interlinked, so knowing more about church will help us in our Christian walk.
- Some responses of 'what on earth is church about' were read
- If we could only use passages of the Bible how would we describe Church? Because that, of course, is where we need to start. Everything we do as Christians has to be based in and around this book. Who we are has to start from here. There are 7 passages which we are going to look at over the week's ahead: Acts 2:42; 1 Peter 1:15f Hebrews 10:25; Colossians 3:16 Acts 9:31; Ephesians 4:12; Matthew 28:19f
- Faith and Food gave me lots of information about what these passages say to them about church.
- In the News Letter (April), I shared a word that is often used for church in the NT. This is *ekklésia*. The definition of the word is 'a group or assembly of persons called together for a particular purpose'. So in the broadest sense church in the NT meant: people together with a specific purpose
- There is one more thing to understand about *ekklésia* and that is when it says people it means people who are called out of something into something else together for a purpose. So it is not just like joining a club, far more central than that.

- It is like the Israelites in the OT, they were called out to be a witness to the world around them. Or like the SAS who are still part of the army but called out to do specific tasks. We will talk about this more but it is important to understand the church is a new people, set apart from the world.
- As we look at this over the weeks and months we need to keep this understanding what the early Christians thought Church was. Otherwise we will go astray.
- So let's start with Act 2:42 (stop and read it). Tom Wright translates it as: *They all gave full attention to the teaching of the apostles and to the common life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"*
- There seems to be three areas described here: They gave full attention to the apostles teaching, to the communion life and to the breaking of bread and praying. Don't think we will be able to look at all of them this week.
- Let us start by looking at the first one 'giving full attention to the Apostles teaching?
- What do you think of someone who had never drove before and drove a BMW at 100miles an hour on the motorway with their eyes closed?
- This is what it is like if we live our lives without giving full attention on the Apostles teaching and as church if we don't encourage/facilitate/help people to focus on the apostles' teaching this is what we are encouraging people to do
- Jesus tells us in the great commission that we should make disciples. Not converts, not members, not leaders, not elders, not teachers but disciples.
- A disciple is a pupil or a learner, someone who wants to learn.
- And of course, as learners (as disciples) they are to become more like their teachers and in our case that is Jesus.
- So the first thing that the church needs to have is a teaching heart, and we all need to be people open to learning. However unlike schools and colleges and universities we need to encourage continual learning. However old people are. However long people have been Christians.
- And as Paul says 1 Corinthians 9:24 it is not just running the race it is finishing the race well!

Questions / thoughts and areas for discussion

- Read through the 7 passages above, what do they say about church to you? Try reading them in two or three different versions. What is different / not different? Why do you think the translators used different words?
- Also what other passages can you think of that speak about church? Jot them down and give them to Mark.
- How have you grown in your faith over the last year?
- We are told that we should seek God with all our heart, how do you do that?
- What stops you growing? Are you a person who is open to be taught?

Please note these are Mark's thoughts etc on the sermon and may not be the Preacher's!