

Sermon Transcript from March 13th, 2016
Church: The Kingdom Spreads to the World
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What comes to mind when I say the word "church?" For a lot of people, it's a building. Right? One like this in particular. First Baptist and a stage and seating and all of that. But, most of you know better. Still, for a lot of other people, what comes to mind is a two-hour event in a building every Sunday. Often, when I bump into another follower of Jesus from another church in this city or around and about, I ask the question, "Hey, tell me about your church."

And, without fail, nine times out of ten, immediately, people start to talk about the two-hour event. "So, our music is kind of like Bethel meets Hillsong meets Indie Techno whatever. And we have pour-over coffee and that's why the Holy Spirit is there and the teaching's really cool and we have this thing and that thing and whatever."

And sometimes, I just want to interrupt and say, "Great, great. That's awesome. You have pour-over coffee. Well done. Tell me about your church. Not the event. Tell me about your church."

It's kind of like if you were to ask me – you don't know me and I don't know you – "Hey, John Mark. Tell me about your family," and if I were to say, "Well, every Monday night we have dinner together. 6:30pm we have a round table. It's an Eames, aluminum group, mid-century, really cool table. We sit around and we start with prayer. Then we eat a plant-based diet. Not all the time, because I'm more vegan but my wife is more sinful."

You would interrupt me and you would say, "Whoa, wait. Stop. That's great. Every Monday night you have dinner together. Well done. But, tell me about your family. Do you have a wife?"

"Yes."

"Do you have kids? How many? Boys? Girls? What neighborhood do you live in? What's your life together life? What are you passionate about, not passionate about? Tell me about your family."

My point is that we come here, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday – well, for a lot of you it's more like every other Sunday. But, we still love you. We come here on a regular basis and I think it's easy to kind of just get sucked into the motion. You know? We come here, we stand up, we sing for a while and stuff in the community and then it's like a TED Talk with the Bible and stuff and we get into it. And I think it's easy to forget the story that we are wrapped in is so much bigger than an event on a Sunday night. So, tonight, even if it's review for some of you, I just want to retell you that story.

Let's start off in Matthew 10:1. We left off last week with Jesus and I just want to show you this: **Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness.**

"These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the follow instructions: 'Do not go to the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

Why did Jesus pick twelve apostles? Why not three or seven or thirty-nine? Why twelve? Well, if you were a first century Jew, twelve was an evocative number. How many tribes are there in Israel? Twelve. Well, technically there are 13, but that's a whole other teaching we don't have time for. But, there are twelve. So, if you were a first century Jew, when Jesus calls twelve apostles, you would know exactly what Jesus was saying. Jesus was saying that He is calling together a new Israel. Jesus is calling this little band of guys, who are hyper-dysfunctional as you read the story, to pick up where Israel left off and carry the story forward. And Jesus' twelve apostles form the nucleus of what we now call the Church.

Turn the page over to chapter 16. This is a story I love. Matthew 16:13, "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi," – okay, so now this is outside of Israel in the north – "he asked his disciples," – and, in particular, we think here the disciples are the twelve – "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"They replied," – "Son of Man," by the way, is a moniker for Jesus – "Some say John the Baptist; others say you're Elijah; and still others, you're Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Kind of back from the dead.

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter,'" – and then listen to this – "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

This is the first time that the word "church" is used in the New Testament. In Greek, it's the word "ecclesia." Can you say that? Well done. It's a compound word. "Ec" is a preposition. It's all over the New Testament. It means "from" or "out of." And then "clesia" kind of essentially means "called." So, more literally this word means "the called out ones." Jesus is calling out a people, a new Israel, a people no longer based on ethnicity. Hey, you're Jewish? You're in. But, now a people based on faith that Jesus is the Messiah and "the Son of the living God."

People from all over the map. In the language of Revelation at the end of the New Testament: every tribe and tongue and nation. Jew and Gentile and Russian and Chinese and American and Puerto Rican and South African. Every people group on the planet. Male, female, young, old, black, white, rich, poor, hipster, hippy and everything in between. Jesus is calling out a new humanity to spread the Kingdom of God all over the world.

And notice the language. "The gates of Hades," or, in today's language, "Hell," will not prevail or will not overcome it. You know, for years, at least growing up, I read this weird statement and I had in my mind's eye this freakish cartoon gate coming at you and it was like a horror movie. "The gates of Hades! The gates of Hell!"

But, if you think about it, are gates – imagine an ancient city, okay? Are gates offensive or defensive? Defensive. Gates don't go on the attack. At least not that I'm aware of. Gates are defensive. So, the imagery here is that the Church will spread out over every square inch of the world and take Hades straight on. And that's exactly what happens. Turn over to Acts 1. Have you ever read the book of Acts in the New Testament? So, there are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All about Jesus. And then you get to Acts and it's essentially a history book about the first three decades of the Church, and this is the next time that we read that word "ecclesia" or "Church."

Acts 1:1. Luke is the author and he writes this: "In my former book, Theophilus," – which is? Does anybody know? Yes. The Gospel of Luke. That was book one. This is book two. – "I wrote about all that Jesus..." – and then listen to this language – "...began to do and to teach."

"So, my last book, what we now call the Gospel of Luke, that was about what Jesus began." And what he's saying is this next one is about what Jesus will continue to do through the Church.

Skip down to Acts 1:6: "Then they [the disciples of Jesus] gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'"

Is it finally here? The kingdom? Like, once and for all?

"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'"

You've got to love Jesus. Just, no love there. None at all.

"But," – and listen to this – "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem," – the capital city of Israel – "and in all Judea..." – that's the area in the south – "and in Samaria," – up to the north – "and to the ends of the earth."

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

Now, if you've ever read the book of Acts before, you know this right here is essentially a table of contents for the book. First, the Church is there in Jerusalem and it's in Jerusalem only. Right in the capital city and the urban core. It starts with a few hundred people and then it grows – we'll read that story – to thousands. But then, years later, it spreads out to Judea, all over in the south, then it makes the jump and it spreads up to Samaria where there were Jews and Gentiles. That was a huge move in Church history. And, by the end of Acts, 30 years later, it's all the way in Rome, the epicenter of the Roman empire. But, before any of this goes down, first thing's first, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. This is a prophecy. And then, out of that, all this other stuff, to the end of the earth, will come to pass.

And that's exactly what happened. Skip down to Acts 2:1, "When the day of Pentecost came, they..." – the disciples of Jesus or the Church – "...were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

This is all Hebrew imagery for the power and the presence of God.

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

And the story goes on. So, the Church, the early followers of Jesus, are all together in Jerusalem for Pentecost. It was a Jewish feast; one of three. Pentecost was an Agrarian feast to celebrate the firstfruits of the harvest. See, you're not a farmer, for the most part. I am not. And the basic idea was that early on in the harvest, you would have a firstfruit. That first head of, I don't know. Whatever. You would have that first head of corn or that first head of grain... do you call it a head? Whatever. You would have it and it was a sign of what's coming. One, two, three, four, five. But, eventually, there's an entire field or field after field all coming behind it. So, you would come together in Jerusalem and celebrate and thank God for the harvest that was going to come.

This feast, over the years, became symbolic for way more than agriculture. It became symbolic for how the Kingdom of God was going to come one day in the future and, with it, the Holy Spirit. So, when the Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost, it's not random or haphazard. This is on purpose. This is God's way of saying, "Listen, what you, Israel, have been waiting for for hundreds of years is finally here."

And the first thing, notice, that the Spirit does is form a community. Skip down to the end of chapter 2. So, a long, drawn out chapter. Spirit comes. Peter stands up in front of the city of Jerusalem and he starts to preach the Gospel, that Jesus is the King, the Kingdom of God is here. And then, at the very end, we read this:

Acts 2:41, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

So, megachurch over night. That's crazy.

"They devoted themselves..." – and I love this glimpse. In one paragraph, we read a glimpse of the Church.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..." – kind of what I'm on about right now – "...and to fellowship [or deep relationships and community], to the breaking of bread..." – we think that's a euphemism for "the table" – "and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles."

So, the Holy Spirit had free reign to move.

"All the believers were together..." – like, there's all sorts of love – "...and had everything in common."

Meaning they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. "Hey, you need money? Here. You need this? Here. You need a car? Here. You need a rental? Here."

"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts."

So, thousands of people all together.

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts," – eating together, it's just central to the Kingdom of God – **"praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people in the city. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."**

Sounds pretty good, right? I mean, almost as cool as our church, but not quite. Now, this church, if you keep reading, was anything but ideal. It was messy just like Bridgetown and just like every other church on the planet. If you turn the page, you read about this guy Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, and it's really weird and crazy. So, it was not perfect, but it was a healthy, thriving community. And all I want you to see right now – we have time for it tonight – is I want you to see this: the way the Kingdom of God spreads – from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the end of the earth – is through a people.

By now, hopefully, – what, five weeks into the series? Hopefully you know it's always through a people. From the beginning of the story, God has been looking for people to co-rule over the Kingdom of God. He started with Adam and Eve, but they failed. So He moved on to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Israel, but they failed. And so, finally, after failure after failure after failure, God said, "Alright. If you want something done right, do it yourself."

And where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus did not. Where Israel failed, Jesus did not. Where you failed, where I failed, Jesus did not. He did what you and I, what Adam and Eve, what Israel never could. And now, on the other side of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, nothing has really changed. God is again, still to this day, He's calling out a people to co-rule over the Kingdom of God. And if you're thinking, "How will this time be any different? Adam and Eve were a failure. Israel was a failure. How will this time be any different?"

What's the one thing that's changed? Jesus and the Spirit. We have the Spirit of God. That's why you read about failure, you read about failure, you read about failure and then, finally, you get to the Church. And it's anything but perfect. We stumble, we fall, but the people of God never go back to idolatry and injustice, the twin sins that you read all through the Old Testament. That chapter is over and done with because now we have the Holy Spirit deep inside. That makes everything different.

Now, last week we left off, you know, with Jesus' central message. The Kingdom of God has come near or it's finally here. To make sense of Jesus' Kingdom message, you have to wrap your head around this idea – that we talk about from time to time – that the Kingdom of God – and this is kind of academic language – is now and not yet. What that means is Jesus, on a regular basis, would teach on the Kingdom of God and sometimes with Jesus, He would make it sound like the Kingdom of God is here, and then other times Jesus would make it sound like it's coming, it's on the horizon or it's in the future. Well, which one? Yes. It's a both/and. The Kingdom is here, but it's not here all the way yet. It's here in bits and pieces and it will spread, inch by inch, mile by mile, city by city, to every square inch of the earth with Jesus' return.

In Jesus language, it's kind of like seed in a field or it's yeast in a loaf of bread. It will spread and permeate and go through all of the world. But, at the end of last week, you're kind of left asking the question: "How? How will this happen? How will the Kingdom of God spread?"

Jesus is not here anymore. He's at the right hand of the Father. We just read that. So, how will the Kingdom of God spread through all the world? And the answer is through the Church. Through the Spirit-empowered community of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Now, this story has honestly changed Bridgetown kind of from the ground up. If you've been around Bridgetown for a while, you'd know that we've changed a lot over the last five years in particular. And honestly, it all started with the story of God. We, at least in leadership for the most part, did not grow up reading the Bible as a story. I did not. I grew up reading the Bible as, I don't know, an encyclopedia of truth or something. You would look of God and sex and marriage and this and that and the other. I had no idea that the Scripture was a narrative. One long, drawn out, sprawling, panoramic story about God and humanity and the world and God's

agenda to put the world to rights.

So, when myself and a number of other leaders started to wake up to kind of the grand, sweeping narrative of Scripture for the first time – and I was 25, 26 or something like that – it's honestly like I was born again again. It was just this really fantastic time in my life. It's like I'd read the Bible since I was a kid and I'd never really read the Bible. So, I was just reading right and left and eating it all up and reading everything that I could get my hands on. But, after a year or two – at first it was, "Oh, this is great. We love the Bible as a story and all this stuff, narrative and theology." But, after a year or two, we started to realize that the way we did church – which, at that time, Bridgetown was very much an event-based church. A Sunday-based, you come, you do your thing, you watch, hopefully you make a friend or two or ten or whatever, but then, essentially, you go back to your life and you follow Jesus kind of all by yourself.

We started to realize, man, that does not line up with the story of God. Jesus dying and rising was not to put on a really good event every Sunday night, it was to usher in the Kingdom of God, to call into existence a new humanity of men and women and brothers and sisters, a family of God to embody the Kingdom, to put flesh and blood on the Kingdom of God and to spread it to every corner of the world.

So, we started to make changes. A number of years ago we made the change to missional communities, and it has been, as you know, a long, hard road. But, I would not trade it for the world. And here's a few of the things we've come to believe about the church. If you're taking notes, maybe write this down. And if not, maybe check your email. First off, – that was lame. Okay. No love. I love you, you don't love me back. Alright. Great.

First thought is this, and all of this is really kind of straight down the middle. So, just stay with me. We follow Jesus in community. Or, put in the negative: we can't follow Jesus alone. This needs to be said, in particular, in Portland. You know, America – we all know this – is, without a doubt, the most hyper-individualistic society in the world. Most sociologists argue in human history. And then, on top of that, Portland and the Pacific Northwest really are, depending on who you talk to, the most hyper-individualistic parts of our entire country. What this means for the Church – and this is just the air we breathe, right? So, what it means for the Church is that, you know, we come on Sunday night and we want to make a friend or two or three and hang out, but for the most part, we just kind of want to do our own thing. But, it does not work that way.

Jesus did not have, you notice in the story, a disciple. Jesus and Peter. No. He had disciples. It was never singular; it was always plural. Think back to that story. He called how many? Twelve. And twelve became seventy and seventy became a few hundred and a few hundred became a few thousand and a few thousand became now billions and billions of people around the world. That group of twelve was the original missional community, and community is the matrix for discipleship. It's where we flesh out the way of Jesus. It's where we are shaped to become more like Jesus. You know, most of Jesus' teachings are on relationships. In particular, if you have ever read the Sermon on the Mount. So, put simply, just to say it straight up, you can't live the way of Jesus if you're not in community, because most of the New Testament is about how you live in community well.

So, if you're not, you can't actually follow Jesus. And when I say "community," I don't just mean friends. Most of you have friends. If not, sorry. I don't just mean friends. I mean, "I'm in community." Ongoing, in-depth, up close and personal relationships with people that you may like and get along great with or you may struggle with. But, people that you are in it together with. Male, female, young, old, but you actually do life with around the Kingdom of God. That is what I mean by community. I know so many people, extroverted, social, happy, life-of-the-party people that are not actually in community and don't actually have that. Friends all over the place, but don't actually have community. And that is where the Kingdom of God – where the rubber meets the road is in community. We follow Jesus together.

Secondly is this thought: the Church isn't – and you all know this, but think with me. The Church isn't an event to consume, but a community to participate in. Church is not just a two-hour thing on Sunday nights here at FBC. Church is a community of people who do life together all week long. The Sunday gathering is great, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. There's so much that you cannot see right now in this room. So much depth of relationship and justice and kingdom and life and discipleship together. So, if this right here is all you know of church – if you come here on Sunday nights and you like it or you don't really like it or whatever, but you're here and you have a few friends, that's great. We're happy you're here. But, if you're not in community, that's not how you live, then you are missing out.

This is especially true at Bridgetown just because of the way we are set up. The best way to think about Bridgetown is as a network of missional communities. All sorts of reasons for that. The main one is just our size. We're not a megachurch at all, but we are large enough that event-based church doesn't work for community here. So, if we were 100, 200, 300 people, we would have events all the time. You know, moms at the park every Thursday morning or Saturday afternoon ultimate Frisbee or men's book study on Thursday morning. We would do events all the time and you would walk into a room with 20 people and you would make friends and start to do life together. But, that just doesn't work with our community. There's too many people. So, the way we're set up, the way we operate is we do life with a group of people, 10, 20 or 30 people, usually in a neighborhood, but not always, and then, on Sunday night, we all come together and you kind of think about your missional community as your family and Sunday night kind of as your tribe.

Our dream is that, if somebody were to ask you from another church, from another city or whatever, "Hey, tell me about your church. Tell me about Bridgetown," our dream is that you would not start with the two-hour gathering. "Oh, wow. We don't have pour-over coffee, but actually, the coffee is roasted by a dude in our church and it's his non-profit and all the profits go to this thing. And our music is like Bethel meets techno – I don't even know what it is, but it's great."

Whatever. And our dream is that, instead of that, you would say, "Oh, my church? Well, there's 17 of us. We live in Northeast. We share a meal every Wednesday night, but we see each other kind of all the time. And some of us get along really well, some of us don't really like each other that much. But, we're following Jesus together. And, actually, that's really good and healthy and the way it brings out the good and the bad and the ugly with us. And we really have a heart for the foster care system. So, once a month, we do this foster parent's night out together as a community in our neighborhood. And we just really want to see the Kingdom of God come.

"Oh, yeah. And then on Sunday night we get together with a whole bunch of other people at this thing downtown. It's pretty cool."

That's our dream. That that is how you would think about church and about Bridgetown in particular. But, to do church this way, it cuts into what the New Testament writers call "the flesh." I'm not sure if you're familiar with that language. The flesh is, essentially, what you feel and what you want apart from the Holy Spirit. And, the reality is we don't always feel like community. We don't always want community. It's much easier to come to Sunday nights and consume than it is to show up on a Tuesday night or whatever and eat a meal and share life and do life with people all week long. Especially if you're not great friends with your community. I just want to say this. I don't think I've ever said this on a Sunday night. What happens a lot at Bridgetown is people come and usually they come because they like the gathering or whatever and then they hear all about missional community and they're like, "Oh, okay. We need to do that and go through basics class and end up in a missional community."

And sometimes, it just clicks. I mean, it's like people are the best of friends and go on to make relationships that last a lifetime – we're five years old as a church, but hopefully last a lifetime. It's just this match made in heaven. And then other times, it's not like that at all. It's just awkward and weird and you don't really click with people or you click with some people but not other people, and it's just this kind of thing. I just want to say tonight that that is okay. That's okay. Your community doesn't have to be your best friends. We talk a lot around here about the different between friends and family. Friends are a people that mirror you back to yourself. Friends are a people you naturally kind of gravitate to, you enjoy, you like to be around. Usually, not always, your friends dress like you, talk like you, think like you, vote like you, listen to the music you listen to, live in the neighborhood you live in or think is cool.

Usually you meet somebody and you're like – this just happened to me last week. I met this guy and I really liked this guy. I'm like, "Why do I?" It's just like instant love for this guy. And I'm like, "He reminds me of me. No wonder I like you so much."

And that's not bad. Like, I'm not down on friendship at all. I have a couple just really amazing friends. Dave was here a few weeks ago and, that guy, I just love like a brother. My friend Johnny in London. Oh, I miss him so much. I have some really good friends. Gerald is a great friend. I have some really great friends. But, that's a little bit different than family, right? Family is kind of just people that you're born into, for good or for bad. And maybe you love your family and you get along great with your family and you're so into your

family or maybe it's not that way at all. But, it's people that you're in relationship with over a long period of time. In fact, you know, a sign of maturity in community is diversity. I want to say that again. A sign of maturity in community is diversity.

I have some people come to me, you know, who are new to the church and say, "Okay. John Mark. I want a missional community in this neighborhood for young married couples married less than five years, no longer, – no kids, that's just weird – that meets on Thursday nights. Go."

I go, "Okay. Here. So, you just want to hang out with yourself? Great. Have fun."

Now, there's nothing wrong with that. If that's your crew, if that's how you roll, there's nothing wrong with that. But, if you only spend time with people who are like you and if you only spend time with people you like and you get along with and you enjoy and who are the same kind of ethnicity, same socioeconomic strata, same stage of life, that's fine. That's great. Don't worry about it. But, you will not grow and mature at the same rate you would if you were to spend time with people from across the spectrum in the Kingdom of God. Old, young, married, single, act together, act not together. Like, the whole thing. So, just think about that for your missional community and also for your life. All I'm saying right now is that, you know, your missional community doesn't have to be your best friends. That's just fine. You don't even have to feel bad about it. That's not the point.

The point is, listen, we want to follow Jesus. We can't do that alone. We have to do that with other people. So, at some point, you have to pick a group of people and say, "Man, we are going to intentionally follow Jesus together. We're going to practice the way of Jesus together over a long period of time as family. We're going to be brothers and sisters with the Father as our God and we're going to do all of that together."

So, we follow Jesus in community, first. Second, community is not an event to consume, but a community to participate in. And then, finally, I just want to say – and I know I say this a lot – life is better in community. Life is better in community. Yes, community is hard work at times, it's awkward, it's frustrating, it's a pain in the neck at times, but it's so much better. Like, we need a balance of idealism and honesty about community and about church. Idealism: we need to say like, "Hey, life is better in community. You were made, from the beginning of the story, for in-depth relationships with other people."

But also, honesty: community is not an easy way to live. Both are true. If all we have is honesty, nobody really wants to be a part of it. But, if all we have is idealism, then people get, you know, I think turned off by community and slip into disillusionment or disenfranchisement or people start to talk about "the Church," this amorphous blob out there. I'm like, "What do you mean by 'the' Church? You mean that one person who hurt you or what? What is 'the' Church?"

Or, this happens even more often, people migrate from community to community to community to relationship to relationship to relationship in search of relational utopia. And, as hopefully you know by now, it does not exist, because you are there. So, it does not exist and we never learn to do life with a group of people over a long period of time. You know, I just got back, as I said, from South Africa, and I was at this church conference that I was teaching at. It was this great church-planting movement. It's about 20-25 years old. They planted churches all over Africa, all over the world, in particular the southern hemisphere. It was just great crew people. Chris Wienand was there. Most of you know Chris. He's the one South African that comes to our church on a regular basis. He's a great guy. He's become like a second dad to me. I was with Chris for a few days and we had a great time.

Honestly, my main takeaway was just to watch this group of people, men and women, who have been in community now for 20-25 years together, who've been planting churches, who've been all about the Kingdom of God for not like a year or two or three – I mean, Bridgetown is like six years old – but who have been at it for 20-25 years. To watch the depth of relationship. These people and now their whole second generation. Kids that had grown up and uncles that had done weddings and life in community and together. It was just so beautiful. My last night there, we went to a cricket game, which was just so lame. Let me tell you. It was like four hours long and I could not figure out what was happening. I just had no – it was the weirdest game I've ever seen. And it was – I'm not a sport guy, but it was South Africa versus Australia, which apparently is one of just age old animosity and whatever.

So, everybody was just freaking out and I'm just in the back laughing. I just thought it was so – no offense – weird. But, I was there and I'm sitting with about 12 of these guys who've been life together for 20 years or something like that. And I'm just watching these guys laugh and cajole each other and tell story after story. "Do you remember that time?" And talk about their marriage and talk about their life, and they were all in town – we were in Cape Town – for one of the pastor's wife's 50th birthday. That's what they were there for. They'd actually come to town for that. And I just sat there and, over and over again, I would say to these guys, "Man, what you guys have is really special." And almost to a time they would say, "Oh, man. But, we really had to fight for it. We really had to fight for it. There were times when I just wanted to, mmm, but we really had to fight for it."

And I just thought, "Man, I want that." Twenty years from now, I don't want to go to a cricket game. No desire to do that. But, I want to sit around with Matt and Anna and Ryan and the people in my community, with Dave and Ashley, with my friends and I want to say, "You know what? We've been through a lot together. There were times where we wanted to just... but, here we are. And we're still together. We're still practicing the way of Jesus. Not alone, but together."

There is something so beautiful and so compelling about that depth and longevity of relationship. And I think this deep ache that I have in my bones that we all have in our bones for community, I think it's from God. I think He put it there. It's what you and I were made for. This story is not only His story, but it's our story as well. When we look at the story of God as a whole, this is the part of the story that we live in. Right? If you think about the six chapters, we don't live in chapters one and two. Like, my name is not Adam and your name is not Eve. We don't live in the Garden of Eden. We don't live in chapter three. We're not in Israel. I'm not Abraham or Isaac or whatever. We don't even live in chapter four. We're not Peter, James and John in first century Galilee. We live in chapter five. We live in the story of the Church. This part of the story calls its readers to participation, and this is kind of where I want to wind down tonight. To participation.

Last month, we used the analogy of how the Bible is kind of like a six-act play. Remember that? Creation, The Fall, Israel, Jesus, The Church, New Creation. And we used the analogy that we're kind of like actors in the play and the world is kind of like the crowd. But, here's the problem: we're missing the script for the second half of act five, The Church. We have the script for acts one, two, three, four – that's like the Old Testament and then the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And then we have the script for the first half of act five in the New Testament as you read about the church in Philippi and Ephesus and Corinth and Rome and how people were working out the way of Jesus in the first century.

And then we have the script for the last chapter in Revelation. We know where the story is going. We'll talk about that next week. But, we're missing the script for this little kind of intermediate time that you and I live in. So, our job, as actors in the play, is essentially like improve theater. It's to join and participate in the story and to act it out in our city and our time. Based on what we know of the story so far, based on the script so far that we have in the Bible and based on what we know is going to come, our job is to live into that story. But, for a lot of us, that is just not how we think about church. We think about church more, you know, like a movie we watch or something like that. Did you know that there are actually church reviews on Yelp? Did you know that? And I looked our church up this afternoon. We only have four stars. Come on, you guys. Get with the program. Door of Hope had five stars. We only have four. Like, what the heck? You know? And I was thinking, what would possess somebody to go onto Yelp and to rate a church without guile? How crazy is that? That's how so many people think about the Church.

Last night, Saturday night at the Comer house, is Saturday movie night. At the end of Sabbath, we all watch a movie. So, usually it's Star Wars. Might as well just call it Star Wars night. But, last night we watched the latest Pixar film, The Good Dinosaur. Anybody see that? Why are you clapping? It was the dumbest movie. That was the first – no offense, whoever you are – dud. I can't think of another. Is there another Pixar dud? I can't...

[Congregation]: Cars

Oh, Cars. Oh. No, that's a good movie, it's just really dumb. It's a good movie though. Anyway, so, you know, we're watching this film. It's me – I just started a controversy here. We're watching this film and it's me and it's my kids and even my wife, half way through, was like, "I'm going to go do the dishes." Like, when she says that, you know it's bad. So, we get to the end of the movie and the credits start to roll and it was just, I mean, it was just lame. The design was weird. It was cheesy. The characters were super stereotypical. The plot, like,

10 minutes in I could tell you exactly what was going to happen. So, it was just not, in my opinion, that great of a film.

So, I get to the end and the credits start to roll and I have my beautiful little kids, and the first thing I said is, "What a lousy movie."

And then I thought to myself, "Gosh. I am teaching my kids to consume and to critique."

But, that's because it's a story that I have no part in. So, I don't have a say in the plot or the script or the character development or what does or does not happen. I have no say. My role is passive, not active. All I can do is sit there and watch and like it or dislike it. I think that's how a lot of people come at the Church, like this thing that we watch that we consume. Honestly, I think that the spirit of consumerism is eating the Church alive from the inside out in America right now. It has to stop and it has to stop with our generation or we will go the way of Europe and all we will do over the next 50 years is manage decline, and I am not interested in that at all. This is not something that we come and watch, this is a community that we participate in. We're much more like actors on a stage than we are spectators in a movie theater. And I don't say this to shame anybody. This is me, this is you, this is all of us. I just want to say that the question for tonight is how do we live into this story?

For some of you, it means that you need to join a missional community. You're not in one. Maybe it's because you're brand new to the church or the city or maybe not. Maybe you've been around for months or maybe even for years and you're just still not there for whatever reason. I'm sure you have one. And so, I think the step for you is to sign up for basics. Come in, start to live and do life with other people, not alone. Remember, friends are great. But, it's a little bit different than a people that you say, "Let's follow Jesus together on a regular basis."

And then I think for others of us, the vast bulk of you and me, we are in a missional community. But, I think that maybe the call is just to reengage. You know? I've been wrestling with this over the last few days, and it hit me how apathetic I have become in my own community. So, I'm in a community like all of your leaders are. And I'm in it and we're actually about five years old as a community. The first two or three years were just like so fun. But then the last year or two, we've just been through a lot as a community. It's been really tough. So, I'm still there. Every single Tuesday night we share a weekly meal. "Hey, guys." I'm there, 110%. But yet, it hit me that, man, I've really just started to slide and I'm really not all that engaged. At least not in the relationships. One or two, but I'm not really all that there anymore. Because it's hard and I know my way around and we've been through it and so on and so forth. So, I've just been wrestling with this over the last few days and I really sense, at least for me, the Holy Spirit kind of calling me back to reengage to be the people of God.

At the end of the day, Church is not a building, it's not an event, it's a family. God is the Father. We're sons, we're daughters, we're brothers, we're sisters. Sometimes we get along great. Other times, we just want to scream at each other. The first thing Jude said when he walked into tonight – I hadn't seen him in a few hours – is, "Dad, Moses hit me right in the nose."

So I said, "You hit him back, right?"

You know? No. I didn't say that. That's just how it is, right? The best of friends, the worst of friends. Family. But, there's something just beautiful about family. As I was praying – I'll end here. Right before the gathering I was just praying and asking God about tonight and I just had, in my mind's eye, a Sabbath dinner. Every Friday night we start Sabbath right at sundown and we light the candles and we sit around the table. I was gone the week before last, but the week before that, Dave and Ashley Lomas were in town to teach here on Sunday, and they came into town early just to hang with our family and be friends. They came over for Sabbath dinner on Friday night and we just had this great night just sitting around the table. We ate for like four hours straight. It was so good and the kids were there and Dave and Ashley have become like an aunt and uncle and Jude was playing the piano and Sunday was doing her gymnastics moves and we were sitting around and we were talking about the good stuff in life and talking about the bad stuff in life and planning our summer vacation together. And it was just this – I didn't want it to end. Partly because I didn't want to do all those dishes at the end, but I just didn't want it to end. I just felt like the Spirit said, "That. That's what Church is right there."

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It's family. People with all sorts of problems, all sorts of issues, but who do life together. So, that's what God is calling you to. That's the call for me, for you. To live. How will the Kingdom of God go forward? One meal at a time. One Tuesday night at a time. One relationship at a time. As you and I embody the way of Jesus together. Let's pray.

