

Title: Making Christ Known
Text: John 17
Theme: How the church displays the gospel
Occasion: Commissioning Service for Greater Glory Church
Aim: I aim to call and convince people to give themselves sacrificially to the unity, purity, bigness and doctrinal integrity of the church.

What did you pray for this week? You prayed for what is important to you. This morning we are going to be praying over and commissioning a group of our members as they leave our membership to start a new church in northern Macomb County. In view of that I am addressing the topic of what is the church. One essential evidence of life is the ability to reproduce. Churches that reproduce other churches should be normal. This is part of our message. Jesus is worth knowing and making known. God raised up the local church as the means to display the gospel, so we need as many healthy churches as possible to display the gospel. This commissioning event is an opportunity to reaffirm what the church is designed to be. Jesus tells us what that is by what he prays for in this text. You pray for what matters to you. Jesus prays for what matters to him and Jesus gets what he prays for. In this prayer for his church, Jesus prays that we would be one, holy, universal (big-hearted) and faithful to sound doctrine. This is what we are called to pursue and be; Cornerstone, Greater Glory and all true churches.

Read Text:

God sent his own Son, Jesus to this world to become one of us. Jesus did what Adam did not do and what everyone of us could not do. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place and then died as the full and final payment for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him. When you by faith alone turn from your sin and trust in Christ alone, you become a Christian. You become a follower of Christ. There is nothing for you to pay, Christ paid it. When you trust in what Christ has done, you are born into the family of God and made a citizen of his kingdom. God has chosen to redeem sinners to be citizens of his eternal and righteous kingdom that he will establish for his Son. And right now, the kingdom of God is previewed through faithful churches.

God's Word calls all of us to make disciples in order to establish churches and God has designed churches to be the homes and gardens that grow disciples. You cannot have disciples of Jesus who follow him well without churches. But that is the challenge, isn't it? Churches are made up of people and people trip us up. People can frustrate us, disappoint us and hurt us. And we do not always agree on everything. Oh yea, but that is why we need each other because people reveal things about our hearts that we otherwise would not know or would not be forced to reckon with. The church is the means that God ordained for your growth.

But faithful and healthy churches will not naturally occur just because you have a group of people who profess faith in Jesus gather together. Faithful and healthy churches tend to be unusual because establishing and protecting a healthy church is hard work. But the church is the bride of Christ and Jesus is worth a beautiful bride.

Jesus said he was going to build his church (Matthew 16.18) and the rest of the NT follows the lives of the apostles and focuses upon the establishing and ongoing work and ministry of a healthy church. God's plan is to have a Church so beautiful, pure, faithful, and glorious that He actively shows it off to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 3.10). So, how can we be a church that God actively shows off to the principalities and powers as a reflection of his glory? We can be this as we pursue unity, purity, big-heartedness and sound doctrine. This is what we are called to be. The church is to be one, holy, universal and apostolic.

1. **The Church is to be One.** (John 17.11, 20-23)

A church is to be a reflection of God and God is one God in three persons. There is unity in plurality. Jesus repeatedly prays for our unity because our unity displays the unity God enjoys as God. And our unity is a reality that will be accomplished in us. This prayer will be answered. Unity is convictional and essential because the church comes from God who is Triune.

a. **The church is one because God is Triune.**

God's plan from the very beginning of time is to have a people he would live with and enjoy forever. The church is a people not one person. Jesus did not say that where you are, there's the church. The NT church always refers to a people because God is a 3-person God. A plurality of people displays the character of God better than one person. But, this 3-person God is one God. Therefore, unity among God's people is SO very important to God. The unity of God is the loving, joyful, harmonious relationship God enjoys as God because the Father, Son and Spirit delight in each other and in the relationship of the others. That is why Jesus keeps appealing to this unity in his prayer as the cause and motivation for the unity of his church. Unity matters because God is one and God is our source, our goal, our pattern and our means.

But unity takes work. It does not happen naturally. Disunity happens naturally. There is nothing supernatural about not getting along. We are born loving ourselves. We naturally prefer ourselves, want others to serve us and make much of us. So when people who are natural born enemies love one another, delight in one another, serve one another, prefer one another, honor one another, help one another, pray for one another, understand one another, have empathy for one another, and even sacrifice for one another, then we are living out what it means to be the body of Christ. Seriously, how are we to convince people that they need to trust in a follow a leader who lived and died 2,000 years ago? They can't see Jesus, can they? Well, in a way, they can. The body, the reality of Christ, the visibility of Christ is displayed by our protecting and pursuing our unity. When we fail to guard the unity of the church we are failing as a church because we are misrepresenting God. Now, here is some encouragement.

b. **The Church is one because the cross makes us one.**

Eph. 2.14-15

The death of Christ is the basis for the unity of the church because the gospel is the great equalizer. The gospel of Christ addresses the fact that every single human is a sinner who has rebelled against the just and righteous rule of God. We are all like sheep who have gone astray. We are unified in our sin and therefore are deserving of God's justice. Every single person is in need of the infinite grace of God. No one can pay for his sin. No one can earn justification. No one can do anything to merit or deserve God's favor. Our sin makes us guilty, whether we are from an immoral, moral or religious background. We are in equal need of God's grace. Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free, rich, poor, male, female, talented, average, successful, or struggling. It doesn't matter. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. The gospel is the means by which we become one. It is the means by which we become part of the unified body of Christ. Already we are one in Christ, but not yet do we live that out as we will.

We have conflict now, because are not yet conformed into the image of Christ, like we will be in glory. How does interpersonal conflict relate to our unity? We do not ignore conflict, nor be defined by it. Because of our inherent unity in Christ, conflict to pursue reconciliation in a humble and healthy way. This is part of the ministry of the Spirit. Paul calls it "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4.3)

This is our biggest challenge and this will be your biggest challenge. But this challenge is an incredible opportunity because as you know this world cannot simply get its act together. We are not surprised that Democrats and Republicans attack each other. But neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can get their act together. They are cannibalizing themselves. Is that shocking? NO. Look at your family and how many people won't talk to others or ghost others, or have cut off others. Look at the tension at work. Look at neighbors who won't talk to each other. Look at the toxic conversations on line. Disunity is everywhere. Unity is shocking because it is so unusual. Unity that is rooted in love comes from the cross because Christ made us one through his death and resurrection. The Church is called to be unified.

2. **The Church is to be Holy.** (John 17.17-19)

Therefore, the church is to be holy because God is holy.

a. **The church is holy because God is holy.**

1 Peter 1.14-16 says, "*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance (what you were like before you came to faith in Christ), but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*" We exist to glorify God. We are to reflect him, image him, mirror him and God is holy.

b. **Already the church is holy because we are in Christ.**

This is what Paul told the church of Corinth (of all churches!). 1 Cor. 1.2 "*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus....*" Already you are sanctified. Already you are holy. Meaning, because you are in Christ, you are positionally sanctified. However,

c. Not yet is the church experiencing that complete sanctification.

2 Cor. 3.18 says, *“And we all, ... are being transformed into the same image (the image of Jesus) from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* Isn't that encouraging? All of us are being transformed by the Spirit into being like Christ. That means that you are going to get there and so are the rest of us. It's going to take people like me a little longer, but we are going to get there. In fact, the love of Jesus for his bride is so powerful and so persistent that his love is going to remove every wrinkle and every blemish. We are not home yet. But, because Jesus made this promise to us, we are going to get there.

d. How should this affect our thinking about the church?

Your purity matters. We know from the fallout in families and relationships that purity matters. But the importance of purity is deeper than that. What you watch, browse, think about, imagine, do, say, all matters. It all matters because it affects us all. There is a direct relationship between the unity of the church and the purity of the church. *“Strive for peace with everyone (unity) and for the holiness (holy) without which no one will see the Lord.”* (Hebrews 12.14). Without purity, there will not be unity. Don't give up in your fight against sin. Satan wants to convince you that it doesn't matter, everyone else is doing it, you know the lies. It does matter. Help others know their purity matters. Let me encourage you to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly so that when you dream and imagine it is of beautiful things that we have in Christ.

3. The Church is to be Universal. (17.18)

Because the church is universal, we are called to be big-hearted. Our church is a local church; it is not the entire church. Jesus said, *“I will build my church.”* In Rev. 5.9 Christ is receiving universal praise because *“you ransomed people for God from every tribe, and language and people and nation.”* The people who are ransomed are Christians. And God is calling people unto himself from every ethnicity. This means that no ethnicity, country, city or territory can claim to be head of the church. She is universal because our head is the King of the ages. And as the King of the ages and the King of all Kings he has commanded the church to go to all ethnicities because he has people that he has chosen to follow him from all of those ethnicities. And, I believe that when the last one comes to faith in Christ and the family is complete that the Father tells the Son, go get your bride. It's time to celebrate! Not yet has the church completed her mission, but she will. Every person who comes to faith in Christ takes us one step closer. This is why we are planting another congregation and hopefully more to come. This is why we want to establish a church in Manitoulin. We have a heart for the nations. We have a heart that is bigger than us. Our finances are ordered by a budget that we prepare, present and vote on. We vote to take care of this church and to give away a lot of funds to help plant churches around the world. We love to do that! Greater Glory, your budget is going to include missions from day one because your DNA is a heart for others and for the nations.

If your church is a business, it will view other businesses (churches) as competitors. You don't love your competition. You want to see them shrink while you grow. How do you think the Lord of the church views that mindset? Other faithful churches are not competitors; they are co-laborers. We are fellow soldiers warring against a common enemy and pursuing a common kingdom for a king who gets all the glory. This means that we ought to pray for other churches and for the churches in other countries. We are part of something that is universal and we want our hearts to be that big. The church is one, holy universal and apostolic.

4. **The Church is to be Doctrinally Sound.** (17.20)

In John 17.20 Jesus is praying for us. We are those who believe the message of the apostles. The message of the apostles is the message that Jesus gave them. It is the Word of God. The word reveals Christ to us and the gospel. The Word tells us what to believe about God, what to believe about the Word, what to believe about people, what to believe about Christ, the Spirit, Salvation, the church, the end times, and eternity. What we are to believe is called sound doctrine. To say that the church is apostolic is to say that the church believes the same things that the apostles taught. We stand in theological continuity with the apostles. "Christianity" has it has been known in times past and many parts of it today, is not true Christianity because it does not stand in continuity with the apostles. I am referring to the true church and the true church is built on the foundation of the apostles.

a. **The church is built on the foundation of the apostles.**

This is implied in John 17.20, but is explicitly taught in Ephesians 2.19-20 which says, *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."* What is that foundation? It is what the apostles taught. What they taught is the Word of God. Therefore, whenever the church has denied, ignored, changed or added to Scripture, it is no longer on the foundation of Christ and the apostles. That is why..

b. **The church is historic only as it is faithful to the teaching of the apostles.**

There has been a lot of effort to reinvent the church and do things that make the church more attractive to others. Some have done this certainly with good intentions, but the results have not been good. When you look to what is trendy to tell you how the church is supposed to function, you then have to keep changing things because trends come and go all the time. One of the complaints about many protestant churches is the lack of reverence and the lack of liturgy. Of course, there is no reverence when your goal is to be cool. And liturgy? That sounds stuffy and impersonal. So, for some, the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church or the Greek Orthodox church is comforting because they feel like they are in a tradition that is older than the newest Netflix release. But we are not linked to the true church by name or even liturgy. We are linked to the true church by sound doctrine. The true church is built on and has always been built on sound doctrine. You can only be a follower of Christ if you understand and believe

the gospel. In order to understand the gospel, you have to hear it (sound doctrine) and believe it.

c. The church has apostolic authority only as it is faithful to God's Word.

As the church faithfully and accurately teaches the Word of God, she is the voice of God in this world. Our responsibility to teach and our responsibility to live out this teaching in how we live is the kindness of God and the visible presence of God in this world.

We exist to make God known as he is. There is no higher calling. We do it as we are one, holy, universal and apostolic. When you read the gospels, you realize that most of the people who saw Jesus and heard him speak completely missed who he really was. I do not want that to happen to you, not only about Christ, but about his church. He died for the church. She matters forever and that should matter to us.

Invite people who are forming Greater Glory Church to gather at base of steps and for the Elders to gather around.

Members to be of Greater Glory Church: Do you affirm that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to be Unified, Holy, Big-Hearted and Theologically sound? And do you affirm your commitment to pursue and display these as you constitute a new congregation?

Members of Cornerstone Baptist Church: Do you affirm that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to be Unified, Holy, Big-Hearted and Theologically sound? And do you affirm your commitment to pursue and display these in our congregation?

4 prayers: