

## What It Means To Be Church

1. Warm-up question: On Sunday we celebrated the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the founding of our church. As part of that, we did baptisms, inducted new members, and presented membership pins for those who reached milestone membership anniversaries. Think back to your own baptism or when you joined this church or when you received a long-term membership pin. Pick one of those events and tell us what it meant to you.
2. Sunday's sermon reminded us what it means to be church. The New Testament Greek word translated as "church" is *ekklesia* [*eck-luh-SEE-uh*], which literally means "assembly," as in an assembly of people. In other words, a large group of people who come together for a common purpose. In Matthew 16, Jesus told us that one of his principal goals was to raise up a people movement (an *ekklesia*, i.e., a bunch of people) to carry his work forward on earth throughout time. He promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against his movement. But doesn't mean being church is easy. Where there are people, there will be problems.
  - a. Because of people problems, it can be tempting to try to live our faith as lone rangers, rugged individualists, off by ourselves, doing our own thing. Have you ever spent time away from church? How did that affect your spiritual life?
  - b. When you hear the phrase "organized religion," what comes to mind? Does LifeJourney strike you as "organized religion"? Why or why not?
3. Being part of any large assembly of people – whether religious or secular – is never easy. So why should we bother? We found some answers in Sunday's scripture passage, which describes the first church of the Christian era, established in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection. Read Acts 2:37-47, as printed on p. 3.
4. Jeff drew three key points from of our scripture passage. **First, we come together as church to learn how to follow Jesus.** Acts 2:42 tells us that the first Christians "devoted themselves to the Apostles teachings." In other words, those who had actually been with Jesus (the Apostles) were teaching those who hadn't about Jesus and what it means to live in his way. Jesus had a lot to say about the way of life he calls us to.
  - a. Jesus said, "I have come that [you] might have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10. What do you think that means? What does Jesus mean by "abundant life"?
  - b. Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, they will save it." Mark 8:35. What do you think that means? What does it mean to lose our life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel?
  - c. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6. What does that mean? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the way to life?

- d. Jesus modeled a way of life characterized by sacrificial love, typified by what he did on the cross. Jeff told us about a dog who risked his life to save a kitten from a house fire. Jeff said, “I found myself thinking, we who follow Jesus ought to be like that dog. We ought to be the kind of people who do stunningly beautiful, counterintuitive things, because that’s the example Jesus gave us – sacrificial love – which can take many different forms, large and small.” We all fail in many ways, but tell us about a time recently when you managed to do something – large or small – that you feel made Jesus proud to call you one of his followers.
5. But learning the way of Jesus is not the only reason we’re called to assemble together as church family. Another reason is found in Acts 2:42, which says the early Christians also “devoted themselves to . . . fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. . . . Day by day . . . they spent much time together.” **This is the second key point: we gather together to find spiritual companionship and support.**
- a. Our Oasis Groups are an attempt to replicate the kind of spiritual companionship and support the early Christians experienced in that first church. Why do you come to Oasis Group? What felt need does it respond to in you?
  - b. Someone recently said, “We live at the loneliest time in human history.” Do you think that’s true? Why or why not? How can church help?
6. **A third reason we gather together is to change the world, making earth more like heaven.** Acts 2:45 tells us the earliest Christians pooled their money to help the poor. “They would sell their possession and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” In his writings, Glenn MacDonald tells how the early Christians were also notorious for staying in cities when plagues hit to care for the sick, at great personal risk to themselves. We too are called to pool our resources to be powerful, positive change agents in our culture, with a special emphasis on helping those who are most despised or vulnerable.
- a. Our church is gearing up to make a BIG difference in addressing the current surge of anti-trans hate in American culture. Our effort will include a citywide billboard campaign that will project a bold spiritual message meant to create conversation about why Christians should support trans rights. Take look at some example billboard messages on p. 3. Which one do you like best or least – and why? If you have an idea about a message not reflected there, share your idea with the group, then email it to [Board@LifeJourney.church](mailto:Board@LifeJourney.church).
  - b. Picture our church putting up billboards across central Indiana proclaiming Jesus’ love and support for trans people. Each billboard has the potential to generate about a million views in a 30 day period. How does all this make you feel? How do you think that makes Jesus feel?

## **Acts 2:37-47 (This passage picks up just as the Apostle Peter has completed the first public sermon after Jesus' resurrection.)**

37 Now when [all the people] heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' 38 Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls.' 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## **Billboard Messaging Examples**

The goal is to raise a spiritual voice in support of transgender people and expose Christians to the positive reasons why we should affirm trans people. Each billboard will include our web address. When people land on our page, they'll see a bold banner at the top that takes them to a fuller discussion. Here are some billboard messages we're considering:

Option 1: WWJD? Trans Rights Are Human Rights!

Option 2: Jesus Loves Trans People – So Stop the Hate!

Option 3: Jesus Loves Trans People – No More Hate!

Option 4: Jesus Said Trans People Are Born That Way – Matthew 19:12. Stop The Hate!

**Do you have an idea for a billboard message?** If so, send your idea to [Board@LifeJourney.church](mailto:Board@LifeJourney.church). Please try to include "Jesus" and "trans" in your message suggestion. Remember, only a few words can fit on an effective billboard.

