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Sept. 8, 2013

## **“Why Church?”**

Acts 2: 43-47

In our increasingly busy lives, why do people make time to go to church?

When you’d rather sleep in, why do you get up on Sunday morning to go to church?

With the ridiculous publicity garnered by Christian extremists like Fred Phelps, why do you want to associate with Christians at a church?

Not to be disrespectful, but really, why are you here?

Today we start on a new series entitled “Why Church?” In the coming weeks, I’m going to ponder with you what prompts us to make a commitment of time and money to be a part of a church. And what do we say to people who offer reasons not to go to church – like “it’s full of hypocrites” or “it’s not relevant anymore” or “I’ve just outgrown the church in my thinking”?

To consider these questions, I chose Acts 2: 43-47 for reflection. It is the description of what would become the first church. It speaks of why church is important – then and now. **Read Acts 2.**

But this morning, with all of our special activities and the beginning of a new season, I thought I would give you a David Letterman style countdown of “why church matters” as a prelude to the coming weeks...

The #10 reason church matters is (and this should come as no surprise this AM)... because it has incredibly inspiring music! Think about the collection of hymnody, sacred music, and spirituals that have enriched the church for generations. Music

is an integral part of our spiritual experience. It was in the church that I first learned to harmonize. It was in the church that many musicians are inspired to write lyrics, tunes, and poetry. ***Church matters because its music inspires us.***

The #9 reason church matters is because it is here that we are exposed again and again to stories and lessons with moral depth. Many of these stories have survived more than one millennium and yet speak clearly to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They contain timeless truth. Certainly, you can read the Bible at home alone... but there's nothing like discussing an age-old truth with others and to be challenged to think outside your own head. It is in the church that my children learned how to live responsively and respectfully. It is in the church that my children learned how to get along with others and that each person is a beloved child of God.

***Church matters because it teaches and models deeply held moral truths.***

#8. Church matters because it provides a community - a beloved sacred space where people can be nurtured and grow. Book clubs serve a good purpose. Country clubs are popular. Social service clubs are benevolent. Friends and family are vitally important. But the church is the one social institution where you give & receive; work & rest; love & are loved; inspired & find solace; teach & learn. The church community is a living organism, a sacred and holy gift, a place of love and support. ***Church matters because it provides sacred space for nurture and growth.***

#7. It is here that rites of passage are performed. I have been privileged to be a part of people's intimate lives...

- Blessing new babies
- Celebrating marriages
- Baptizing with water and tears, as a new life is embraced
- Going to sporting events, or recognition and award ceremonies to cheer for an honoree
- Responding and speaking on behalf of the church when there is a community tragedy

- Even the dissolution of a marriage is a sacred rite
- And I've been with a candidate for public office as she filed her candidacy with the election commissioner.

We laugh together and cry together. We celebrate and we mourn together. ***The church matters because it provides rites of passage for the ups and downs of life.***

#6 The church matters because it reaches out to those in need. The major hospitals in our city were started by churches. The social service programs in our community are often founded by and church-supported. Nursing homes, services for people living with disabilities, child care, shelter for the homeless, food and job services for the poor... ***church matters because it reaches out to those in need.***

#5 The church matters because it offers a place for reflection and renewal. Each week, millions of people go to church to find something that encourages them to go forward into the new week. It is here we find hope to carry on, times of prayer and meditation, reflection, and inspiration. ***The church matters because it offers a place for reflection and renewal.***

#4 The church matters because it gives us an opportunity to meet new people and to be challenged by them. This is a two-edged sword; a joy and concern. To be blunt – there are some among us who are difficult to love. If we didn't belong to the same church, we might not associate. Church teaches us to find value and worth in each person and to be loving and patient with those who push our buttons. No other place can better prepare you for dealing with people than the church! ***The church matters because it gives us an opportunity to meet new people and to be challenged by them.***

#3 The church matters because it reminds us of our history and our future. So often, we are tempted to consider our lives out of context. We forget we are part of a flowing stream of creation. From dust we came and to dust we return. Yet, the lives and stories of those who went before us are vitally important to

understand. Their story is our story. We are not alone. We are a part of a beautiful patchwork of history. To learn sacred history is the foundation for creating a holy future. ***The church matters because it reminds us of our history and our future.***

#2. A short story to illustrate the #2 reason church matters: This week, our longtime friends, John & Beth Adamson were in a terrible car accident. Beth, 50 years old, a Wichita teacher, mother of 2, and a lovely person, was killed. John & Beth were active in their church and their children attended school through the church. Along with their family and friends, it is the church to which they turned. The church offered prayers, a place for a memorial service, and clergy who are caring and understand grief. It is the church where Beth's stories will be told and where her family will find solace in the months and years to come. All of us will die at some point. And the church will likely be called to participate in some part of your death – perhaps at your bedside, with your grieving family, offering words of comfort and peace, bringing food, sending cards, reaching out with love and care. The church cannot stop your death. It can, however, remind you that you and your family are wrapped in love and held in prayer. And that's the #2 reason why ***church is important: because it ministers to and offers solace to those who grieve.***

And the #1 reason church matters (drum roll please) is that it reminds us that there is something bigger than us in the world – a divine energy, an entity, or God (however we conceive of God.) So often we are prone to get involved in our own worlds of work, family, activities, and life that we lose sight of the ultimate purpose of life. We forget that our souls are important; that life itself is sacred; that there is a holy power at work within us. And that's the number 1 reason that ***church matters – because it keeps us grounded and connected to God.***