

The Oxford American Dictionary lists several definitions for the noun *church*. 1) A building for public Christian worship. 2) A religious service in (the building). 3) The whole body of Christian believers. This one is usually capitalized, i.e. the Church.

I am sure that all of you are familiar with all three of these, but if you are truthful, you probably use the first two the most often. Afterall, we *go to church to go to church. And then when church is over, we leave the church and go home.*

But I also think that you know that the third definition, the Church, is the truest definition. We, you and me, are the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, and we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ on earth.

When we say that we want to follow Christ and we accept Christ as our personal savior, we become a member of the Church, well sort of anyhow. There is baptism, confirmation, the Apostle's Creed.

Many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century dismiss such rites and traditions. And I think that that is sad. *As long as I say that I believe in Jesus, why do I have to do all of that other stuff? Why do I have to be baptized and join a local congregation?* These are the rites of the Church that the followers of Christ have used for centuries to formalize, to show commitment, solemnize, and celebrate membership into the Church of Jesus Christ.

But I still have not answered the question about the need or importance of belonging to, and being active in, a local congregation. Being a follower of Christ means being in a relationship with Christ. It means learning about the journey humankind has traveled from The Fall (Genesis) to the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus (the Gospels), the birth of the Church (Acts), and the spread of the Good News (the epistles).

For a relationship to last and flourish there needs to be effort. The local church provides opportunity for worshipping an omnipotent God, being in relationship with other members of the body of Christ, and experiencing the work of the Spirit (Matthew 18:20). The church provides opportunities for fellowship and support.

I once heard the need to attend worship and church functions this way. Marriage does not require you to spend time with your spouse, but if you do not, the relationship will likely not last. The Church is often referred to as the bride of Christ. It is a relationship that requires time and devotion. And I and many other can attest to the joy and fulfillment of a close and intimate relationship with our Lord.

I know that the past year and a half has been tough, and many relationships have struggled. But through it all God has been with us, individually and as a congregation. For those who have been vaccinated and feel safe, this may be the time to return. For those who are not yet ready, we will continue to provide worship services via the internet, and I am always available to talk on the phone or visit.

If you have been attending FPC for a while but have not yet made it your official church home, maybe now is the time. We will be having a new member class in the near future. Please call me to chat if you would like more info about church membership.

In Christ,

