

Oh dear...here we go again...

These six verses from Matthew have many issues with which we could deal today...

What I would like to choose one word to reflect upon this afternoon is

That one word is “Church”...

what does it mean?

What is church???

Lots of people tell me, ...well, we don't go to church much, anymore...

which generally means that they do not attend a religious services in a building on a regular basis...

I hear a lot of people say they get mad at ‘the’ church...

Which generally means they are frustrated by certain rules, regulations and practices...

Others tell me love ‘the’ church...

they love the rituals, the music, the prayers, the art, the history, the traditions...

But whether you love it or you hate it...

whether you go every week or never at all...

many of us seem to have this way of speaking about “the” church as if it is the monolithic, megalithic “thing”...

Somehow in these conversations that I have with all these people...

the church is often, not always, but pretty often,

different from the community of people inside the building...

and that is a good thing, I would suggest.

The Greek word that Matthew used in our reading was Ekklesia

It has been translated for millennia as ‘church’...

But Ekklesia, isn’t a thing or a building...

**Scholars say that it is better translated as ‘a people called out’
an assembly...the congregation of Yahweh...**

**Ekklesia has been most recently translated in the mid 1960’s by the second Vatican council,
as ‘the people of God’.**

**Church is a community of people... who, in the Christian sense,
are attempting, struggling, intending... to live the teachings of Jesus the Christ...**

**It is not so much a matter of ‘going’ to church,
as it is a matter of ‘being’ church.**

**Now...hopefully going to a church helps you to be church...
But we all know that isn’t necessarily true...**

**Be that as it may... what are the qualities or characteristics of a community of
people attempting, intending to be church,
whether or not you actually get together inside a building?**

**I choose this hymn intentionally today because I believe it has a lot of good ideas, values,
and characteristics of what ‘being’ church might look like...**

As we attempt to Be Church we realize that we are summoned by God...

It’s not our idea: God seems to have hard wired us community, for relationships.

I think we could agree that it’s tough to go through this life alone...

Being church on this beautiful planet is not going to look ‘vanilla’

We are rich in diversity.

Just look outside the window: there is not one kind of bird, or one kind of tree or one kind of flower. Apparently God loves diversity!

**All the many colors and hues of humanity,
all the vibrant cultural expressions of all the tribes on earth
show the extravagant creativity of the Holy One...**

Being Church is universal and Cosmic

**Being church is Male and Female who are both made in God's image,
Male and Female who are both God's delight....**

Enough said.

Being Church is to Trust the goodness of creation:

God is made known through all of creation...

**Humanity has magnificent opportunities to show
creativity, compassion, love and generosity...but we are not the only ones!**

Watch the great apes or the dolphins or our own pets...

they can all teach us a thing or two about genuine faithfulness and unconditional love...

Being Church is to bring the hopes of every nation...the art of every race....

church is not just America or Israel or Germany or China or Peru...

church is not just white or black or Hispanic or Asian...

all beings hope for food for their young,

safe shelter and

enough to sustain life...

this widely diverse human community gives expression to

beauty and joy and sorrow, adoration, gratitude, pain and wonder

through art, music, dance... all unique to their own place and space in time

Being church is to weave a song of peace and justice...

Peace and justice for all...human and non human is alike...

**Being the Church that Jesus gave his life for isn't a building or a thing,
but a gathering, a community of people,
in all of their complexity, diversity and beauty...**

**Being the Church that Jesus dreamed of creating
is being a community of people willing to be church for each other.**

What does that mean?

**It means that we are there to hold each other up,
when we feel life is pressing us down...**

**It means that we are there for each other to celebrate with each other all the goodness, the
beauty and the joy of our lives!**

**It means that we help each other to forgive 70x7,
we help each other to cross to the other side of the road to offer compassion and kindness,
that we help each other to become more loving than we ever thought possible.**

Being Church for each other ought to happen everywhere:

in your home, at the beach,

in the forest,

in the city park,

in a cathedral,

even in a little chapel in the woods...

**Being church is where the Reign and Dream of the Holy One is being birthed in,
through and for love for all of creation....**

Is Being church easy? Does it feel good all the time?

Is everyone always on the same page?

Of course not...

**This life, our human experience,
the chance for our souls to live in these bodies
and feel the freshness of summer rain on wet grass,
to look up into the summer's night sky...
to hold a newborn babe,
to witness the first flight of baby birds from the nest...
to watch the evening news with all of its pain and its violence,
to sit at the bedside of one we love and watch them
slip from this life....
is always complex, often times difficult, and rarely clear...**

**Often times we find ourselves
wondering what is the next loving thing to do,
the next loving thing to say....**

**Being Church for each other can help us with all of that...
or, at least, it is what we strive towards....**

Oh dear...here we go again is right!

**One more time recognizing what amazing, wonder-full,
miraculous world we live in!
What an amazing, magnificent, complex adventure this life is...
what a beautiful, difficult, magnificent experience it is to be human,
to be church...
Yet through it all, let us never to forget to say thank you...amen!**