

The Community of Saints

Bible Class for 4-19-20

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Introduction: Restrictions on gathering people in large numbers has caused most congregations to provide their services on-line or by audio, not in-person. For some, they can't wait to get back together for in-person services! For others, virtual is good enough; the church is not about a "building," anyway.

This study explores how the Bible defines "church," including what it is, who creates it, and what it is designed to do. Beginning with Acts and continuing through other portions of the New and Old Testaments, we will search to discover and apply God's design for faith and community. We will also include insights from Naomichi Masaki's study on Community: We are Not Alone, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic book, Life Together. As an online study, you are welcome to send questions to rblomenberg@immanuelseymour.com

Getting Started. Have you heard anyone say:

"I can be a Christian without being a member of the church...."

"Spirituality is personal; it's in my heart. No one can define that for me."

"I'm a spiritual person; I'm just not very religious."

"Spirituality is on the rise in America, while main-stream churches decline."

"More and more Americans seem to like designer faith, not denominations."

Such statements tend to emphasize "personal" faith and make community a secondary thing. Is this Biblical?

Each week we confess that we believe in "the Communion of Saints." What does that have to do with God's plan for our life together?

1. What is the "Church?"

Identify some things that people may mean when they say "church":

- *A specific building at the corner of Walnut and Oak*
- *A denomination, like Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic*
- *A worship service: "We went to church Sunday."*
- *Other:*

What does the New Testament word for church, "*ecclesia*," mean?

It is Greek for "called out." When Jesus called disciples to follow Him, it was Jesus who did the calling. They were not volunteers, but "called ones." The church are all those called to faith in Jesus.

What are some “word pictures” the Bible paints of the “church?”

Read

1 Corinthians 1:2

1 Peter 2:4-5

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Ephesians 2:19-22

Romans 8:15-17

Ephesians 5:21-33

John 10:14-16

What are some dynamics these “pictures” have in common?

Plural, not singular

Interconnectedness of individuals with Christ and others

Each picture is Christ-centered and Christ-serving

Each describes something Christ has designed and sustains

Augsburg Confession, Article VII, states: The church is “where the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments properly administered.”

God creates the “called-out” ecclesia through His Word and Sacraments.

Where they are, the church is called into being.

Small Catechism: “The holy Christian Church is the communion of saints, the total number of those who believe in Christ.”

Communion is a way of speaking here of those who are a community of faith in Christ, which makes us holy, forgiven, and connected to His body.

2. The Church in Acts

Read Acts 1:1-2

Acts 1:8

Acts 1:21-26

Who is at work in and through the church?

3. For next week: The Church and the Holy Spirit--Acts 2