

October 6, 2018 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
 Ephesians 1:10/22; Philippians 2:6-8 The Church: Founded In Love by Andy McDonald

What comes to your mind when you hear the word, just the word, “Church”? For many maybe it’s a building? When our minds take us to a building it may be the picturesque little white building with wood siding and a small steeple, or it may be the big brick First Baptist or First Methodist church in so many towns here in the south. Or maybe even today’s mega church that is more the vision of a performing arts center.

Maybe when you hear the word church people pop into your mind. The congregation of people who assemble each week in one of those buildings. Maybe you think of church as people. Or maybe you think of church as denomination. As in the Baptist Church, or Presbyterian, or Anglican, or Adventist Church

It may not be that when you hear the word “church” that you can conjure the picture of something invisible. The “invisible” church. The universal “body of Christ” may not jump to the front of your mind.

Of course these are some of the possibilities for those of us familiar and associated with church . It is sad to me that recent research reveals that the six most common perceptions of the Church among post-Christian 20- and 30-somethings include:

The Church is an organized religion with a political agenda.

The Church is judgmental and negative.

The Church is dominated by males and oppresses females.

The Church is homophobic.

The Church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong.

The Church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally.

What comes to the minds of these post Christian or non-Christians isn’t very flattering. And why would they have these perceptions?

These perceptions aren’t based on imagination but these perceptions are theirs because they have seen and experienced and observed the church being that way. They have seen and heard the church organize to achieve a political agenda. Church people have spoken up in judgmental and negative ways—maybe in general or maybe to them in particular. Too many stories have been shared of male dominance and the oppression of females by the church, women not allowed leadership or pastoral roles equal to the men. They’ve seen people from churches holding signs and marching and saying hateful homophobic words. The church has claimed and sought supremacy and put other world faith’s down. And in a world of fundamentalism the church has its own versions who would take the whole Bible literally.

This is sad because it is so far from God’s plan for His church.

In our series of sermons this month on the church, I want to identify what we are talking about. Your like, Andy we aren’t dumb, you told us we are talking about the church. But what I want for us and what we must keep in mind is that while there will be implications for the building we call church, and while there are messages and implications for our denomination we call church, what we are primarily talking about this month is the church as the body of Christ universal. Beyond the various tribes of body, beyond facilities, beyond singular local congregations we are talking about the body of Christ, what some might call the invisible church.

We begin by recognition that the church is founded in love.

For all eternity God is love. Christianity has come to understand from both the revelation of scripture and the testimony of Jesus Christ that this eternity was shared by mysterious unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the wisdom of God he chose to make humans in his image. There is in the very nature of love a desire to share to enlarge to serve and care. To live in relationship.

You may remember the Biblical understanding that prior to the creation of this world as we know it, there had been a rebellion in heaven.

What marked all eternity, what was the economy and society the distinguishing feature of the Godhead and all of heaven was and is other directed love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and the Holy Spirit glorifies, loves the Father and the Son.

But one just below the exalted level of God was the angel Lucifer who was perfect in all his ways until evil was found in him. He said, "I will be like the Most High and his desire for self-exaltation brought a new view, a new pursuit. Until then all heaven had been united in a circle of love and respect with God at the apex providing service of love to all and receiving all love and praise from all of heaven. Lucifer didn't really want to be like the Most High because the Most High is marked by unselfish ministry. Lucifer wanted the attention, and power, and calling the shots but not the character, the most important aspect of God.

So there was this blight in the universe when God sets about creating this world and humans. In this perfect world he created, with a perfect environment still after the creation of man something was "not good" even declared so by God.

Man was created to bear the image of god, to manifest the likeness of his Maker, but this could not be done in isolation. This is why God created him male and female. He constructed the human as a family. The responsibility God gave was for them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. God's plan was for the whole earth to be saturated with relational units manifesting his image.

Here we have the very first foundations of the church – shared life as a demonstration lab of what it means to live in love, to practice other-directed, self-giving love.

Later when history brings us to the coming of Christ we will see the original plan reestablished in what we more commonly think of as "the church".

Jesus comes and perfectly reflects the image and glory of God. Paul will eventually write to the Colossians "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God ..."

Lucifer turned Satan accuses God of selfishness, that he wants his position and power and place because he is inordinately selfish and that all of his creations should be set free for self-determination. He accuses that God is glory hog seeking glory. The reality is that in Satan's kingdom dominion becomes the prize of the strongest. Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of force; every individual regards every other as an obstacle in the way of his own advancement, or a steppingstone on which he himself may climb to a higher place. (DA 436)

The contrast of Jesus could not be greater. Paul writes about Jesus "Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave

and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.”

Here we have history's most perfect expression of sacrificial love. And the clearest revelation of what it means to manifest the image and glory of God.

Listen, this is the foundation of the church. It was God's original intent and it is his intent today. The church is the object of the love of God. God cares for you the church. His love is unqualified and unlimited. But his love isn't just for us. He wants to equip us to share his love with others, his self-sacrificing, other directed love.

And maybe you say, Andy I get it. And while that may be true for all of us conceptually, mentally, it's not so easy to grasp in our individualistic, me first world.

It was after the transfiguration. Jesus came down from the mountain and he healed a boy of what the story calls an unclean spirit and then on the way back to Capernaum on the shore of Galilee, as they were walking the disciples fell back and let Jesus get out ahead of them. He had tried to warn them of what was coming. That he would go up to Jerusalem and be put to death and rise again; that he would be betrayed into the hands of his enemies, but the disciples couldn't comprehend his words because they were so full of themselves. They hung back so they could argue about positional power. They caught that he was heading back to Jerusalem and all they could imagine was the coming of the kingdom and finally they would have seats of authority and power. They argued about who would be greatest in the new kingdom.

Finally, the Savior gathered his disciples about him and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all.” Then just a little while later He said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that heaven values.

Jesus explained that his kingdom is not characterized by earthly dignity and display. At the feet of Jesus all these distinctions are forgotten. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, meet together, with no thought of caste or worldly preeminence. All meet as blood-bought souls, alike dependent upon One who has redeemed them to God. (DA437)

When Jesus formed the church, when he builds his church that will be victorious and against which the gates of hell will not prevail, it is on the very same foundation he laid in Eden, self-giving love.

God laid the foundation for the church in his extension of love from himself into the primordial family of Adam and Eve. And they messed up . They bought the lie. They drank the cool aid. And instead of revealing other-directed, self-giving love of the Father they exemplified self-grasping. “The woman saw the tree and TOOK its fruit

And so while the church was founded in love, sin plagues us and our reputation is bad in the world because sin has had its way in us. We too have become self-grasping. How do I get more, have more, hold more, be more, have more say.

God's plan of love for our world is a relational plan and too often our tribe of the Body of Christ along with many other tribes have made it all about truth about believing the right things to the neglect of the primacy of relationship. Jesus said that this is life eternal that we know God and the one he sent. Again Jesus didn't say that the world would recognize us as his followers if we have all the truth lined up just right. Truth is good. Being right is preferable than being wrong. But Jesus said his followers would be recognizable based on relationship.

Paul couldn't have been more clear that if we have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries of the future and know everything about everything and even have enough faith to speak to a mountain and make it move without love it is all nothing, because love is all that lasts.

The essence of trinity life is to be essence of "the church" Paul grabs it "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Jesus modeled this as he submitted himself to the cross, and he calls us to lives of mutual submission and not self-grasping.

The world needs the church to stand up and be counted. The world needs the church to model this self-sacrificing, self-giving, non self-grasping love.

You see we should understand that our battle, our struggle, our war is not against our fellow humans. But it is against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph 6:12

When Paul challenges the Ephesians about how to live he calls on them to stop all the behaviors that would break or tear down relationships.

He says "Put away all falsehood and tell your neighbor the truth because we belong to each other. ...Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry. Don't steal. Don't use foul or abusive language, let everything you say be good and helpful
Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander...instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

The world needs the church even if it doesn't realize it. It needs the church to return to its foundation of self-giving, other directed love.

All relational division...All interpersonal abuse
All racial strife...All gender bias and cruelty...All international discord
Stems from the failure to embody the glory of God's love. To be willing to choose to be last, to lay down our lives for others.

God is calling the church, God is calling you and me to model and demonstrate and be lovers of our world, to be willing to lay down our lives, to take up our cross and follow Jesus on this path self-sacrifice.

Then the church founded in love will be able to love people into lifelong friendship with God



What first pops into your mind when you hear the word church?

What has been your experience with church?

Why do you think post-Christians 20 and 30 year olds have these perceptions of "church"?

- 1 The Church is an organized religion with a political agenda.
- 2 The Church is judgmental and negative.
- 3 The Church is dominated by males and oppresses females.
- 4 The Church is homophobic
- 5 The Church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong
- 6 The Church is full of fundamentalist who take the Bible literally

How challenged are you by the call to be a self-sacrificing church?

What's the level of difficulty in our culture to not be self-grasping?

What do believe should be the balance between dividing over truth verses protecting relationships?

In what ways is self-grasping responsible for the problems we see in our world?

How will you surrender self-grasping for self-giving love?



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