

In 1953, a gallon of milk ran you \$0.94, and there was a place called a post office where you could write an email on a piece of paper and send it – it was called a letter – to the recipient with something called a stamp, which would cost you \$0.03. The highest rated TV show in 1953 was *I Love Lucy*, and this was the year a car company named Chevrolet assembled their first Corvette. In 1953, the Detroit Lions beat the Cleveland Browns to win Super Bowl XXI and the Yankees beat the Dodgers to claim the World Series.

And on this weekend in 1953, in a little town called Beavercreek, OH, a community of people came together in a barn down on Dayton-Xenia Rd to form the Knollwood Church of the Nazarene, a church that would one day become Beavercreek Church of the Nazarene. Today marks the 60th anniversary of our first worship gathering. Today, this particular body of Christians turns 60 years old. In order to celebrate that with you today, I want to spend some time on a basic question: What *is* Church, anyway? What exactly is turning 60 today, and how does it relate to the larger Church, to Jesus?

Ultimately, I want to consider with you the best way to celebrate 60 years of Beavercreek Church of the Nazarene. And what we'll discover is that faithfulness to our church's heritage - and faithfulness to God's call on us - means moving forward, not looking backward.

Many of us think of the Church as a backward-facing institution (both in good and bad ways). We see the Church as primarily concerned with what happened in the past (especially Jesus' life, death and resurrection). But from our founding, God called the Church to be a forward-moving gathering of people who are following Jesus into new life. The Church is those who've accepted God's invitation to join in the restoration of the world. Jesus' resurrection isn't just a historical fact, a thing that happened once a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Jesus' resurrection is a reality we experience now, a new life that calls us forward, to build on our heritage, not defend, protect or hide behind it. Faithfulness means doing the next right thing, moving forward, taking the next step God calls us to in our journey with him.

But to get there, we need to begin with that question. So: what is a Church? What exactly is turning 60 today?

Without even thinking about it, Church for most of us is a building. This particular building, since we're all here. But right away, we're in trouble. Even the oldest part of this building (the Kids gym where our kids are worshipping right now) was only built in the 1970s. This sanctuary didn't exist until the 90s, and the newest part of the building in 2001.

When we say Beavercreek Nazarene turns 60 today, we're not talking about the building. We're talking about this group of people. We who're gathered here to worship God together. This assembly turns 60 today.

That's how the New Testament defines Church: not as a building, but as a group of people. That group began with Jesus' disciples, his closest followers. Turn with me to Matthew 16. If you grabbed one of our Bibles on the way in, it's on page XXXX. And if you don't own a bible, please consider that a gift from us for you to keep and use.

Jesus and his disciples are near a town called Caesarea Philippi, a town in the northern part of Palestine. Jesus takes this opportunity to ask what they're saying about him on social media. Let's take a look, beginning in v13:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit* on earth will be permitted in heaven.” – Matthew 16:13-19

So Jesus turns from the buzz on the street to his closest followers: What do you guys think? And Peter gets the right answer. He says, You're the Messiah! You're the son of God!

In response to this statement, Jesus declares that he's building his "church" - that word we're so curious about. The Greek word there literally means "the called-out ones". It was used to describe groups of people who came together for a particular cause - like we would think of a PTA or Boy Scouts or Rotary group or something like that.

Jesus says, On this confession - that I'm the Messiah and son of God, I'm building an assembly of people. I'm gathering those who "get" this, who understand who I am, together. And this group will be so powerful, so world-changing, that hell itself doesn't stand a chance.

So what does it mean that a guy named Simon son-of-John, whom Jesus nicknamed Rocky, would call Jesus "Messiah"? If we want to understand what the Church is, we need to understand Peter's confession.

To answer that, we need to zoom out and head back in time, get the background of how Peter would've understood the world:

Peter believed God created the world to be a place where we humans lived and worked in partnership with God. We were created to be a picture of God for the world to see (If you were worshiping with us at the first of the year, you know we spent a lot of time in these creation stories).

But we chose not to follow God, to partner with God. We sinned, and broke creation, broke our own souls. We turned away from God, rejected God's way in favor of our own, limited

understanding. And the world suffered. Our relationships with each other suffered. Instead of the life God intended, we knew death.

But God didn't abandon us. God came to a man named Abraham and struck an agreement with him: If Abraham would follow God, then God would use Abraham's descendants to rescue the world. God was again inviting humanity into a partnership.

Abraham agreed, his descendants became the nation of Israel. A few hundred years later, after God had rescued them from slavery, God renewed the covenant with them. This time, God said, "If you will be my people, I will be your God. And I will make you a kingdom of priests."

That was powerful language for the Israelites. They lived in a culture of Temples and Priests. In their world, the gods were too holy to approach. They were too dangerous. A special group of people - the priests - served as bridges between the gods and the people. Priests represented the people to God and represented God to the people.

But here God was calling this people, the Israelites, to be a whole nation of priests. God was claiming to be the God not just of Israel, but of the whole world. And each of the Israelites would bear the responsibility to present God to the world. Just like in the beginning, they were to be a picture of God to the rest of the world.

The Israelites agreed, so the covenant was born. They received the Law, a guide to how to live as God's people, what it looked like to present God to the world.

But Israel wasn't any better than us at staying faithful. They had good years and bad years. Faithful generations and unfaithful generations. In the end, they couldn't uphold their end of the bargain. They couldn't faithfully present a picture of God to the world. And they knew it.

So they began to dream of a person who could. A person who would come among them and show them how to be faithful to their calling. A person who could rule them as a wise, just and holy king. A person who could rescue them from the consequences of their unfaithfulness, their inability to live faithfully as God's image.

A person who could rescue not only them, but the whole world, as God had intended. They called this person the Messiah, which in Hebrew means "anointed". Chosen by God.

The Messiah represented all the hopes and dreams of Israel. A person who could be faithful when they weren't. A person who could save them from their own failures. A person who could show the world a perfect picture of God.

Now, back to Caesarea Philippi: a guy named Jesus collected a group of 12 other guys who've been following him. He called them all in pretty much the same way: he walked up to them, interrupted what they were doing and invited them to follow him.

This is important: he approached them the same way the other teachers of his day approached their students. He didn't give them a theology quiz or test their biblical knowledge or tell them he was God or anything. In fact, the only unusual thing about his followers was who *they* were. They

were rejects, guys who hadn't been chosen by the other teachers. Guys who for whatever reason didn't make the cut.

So these guys agree to follow Jesus. They sign up to follow a teacher around, to learn from him and become like him.

But it doesn't take long for them to begin to wonder. He's powerful. His teaching is... different from what they're used to. Wherever he goes, lives change. Sin is forgiven. People are healed.

They begin to realize this Jesus guy is more than just a teacher. Some are saying he's a prophet. But they see he's more than just a prophet. Some are even saying he's Elijah, one of Israel's most beloved champions, returned from the dead. But the disciples realize he's even more than Elijah was.

Which brings us to that moment, when Jesus looks at them and says, What do you think's going on here, guys? Have you figured out who I really am yet?

And Peter blurts out what they've all been suspecting: You're the Messiah! You're *God*! You're the guy we've all been waiting for, the perfect picture of God, the one who's going to rescue us and the whole world from our failures, our sins, from death itself!

And Jesus says, Bingo. Peter, you nailed it. God has allowed you to see the truth. And this new thing I'm doing, this people I'm assembling, will be founded on that truth.

Jesus is the perfect picture of God. The perfect priest, the bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus saves us from sin and death and reconnects us to God, to the life we were always intended to live.

And the Church is the people who know that, who've said Yes to Jesus' invitation to be a part of God's restoration movement. The people who've come face-to-face with their need for rescue and reached out for Jesus' hand.

The Church is those who have said, You are the Messiah! You're the son of God!

The Church is not a building. The Church is not a worship gathering on a Sunday morning or a collection of classes on Wednesday night or a small group or shoveling mulch in a park or any other program. These are things a Church *does*, but not what the Church *is*.

The Church is that group of people who have seen who Jesus is, who have been called together by God to join in God's ongoing rescue. Paul, one of the first people to follow Jesus after he rose from the dead, called the Church ambassadors of God's kingdom. Think about what that image says:

Just like Israel, we are to represent God to the world. We are citizens of God's kingdom living in foreign territory, representing our king and our kingdom to those who aren't a part of it. The difference is our visas are free, we don't build walls to keep immigrants out. God's kingdom is open to everyone, and just as God invited us in, so we extend the same invitation to everyone we meet.

Paul also called the Church the "Body of Christ". It's hard to get more literal than that: Paul imagined that we are an actual picture of Jesus to the world around us. When you and I clasp hands or exchange a hug, we're embracing each other with our bodies. So too the Church is to be Jesus' body in the world. When we interact with those around us, we are interacting as pictures of God. We are serving as Jesus.

The Church is that image of God in creation. The Church is that kingdom of priests, serving as a bridge between God and humanity. The Church is the people who say, You are the Messiah, the son of God! The Church is those who've been called together to show the world a picture of God, and to invite the world to join God's kingdom.

So what does that mean for those of us who are gathered here today to celebrate the 60th year of this particular church in this particular community? I've spent an awfully long time talking about the past when I said that faithfulness to God isn't about the past!

That's because moving forward isn't about abandoning or ignoring the past. It's about not being defined by and beholden to the past. It's the difference between Tradition and Traditionalism. Tradition is a respect for and embrace of the past. Traditionalism is worship of the past.

An example would help: let's consider that great American pastime, baseball. There's no doubt Baseball is full of tradition. Many of us love baseball today because we spent many a day at a ballpark as kids, either watching or playing.

But the game of baseball looks very different today than it did 10, 50 or 100 years ago. Everything from the way we track stats (or even what stats we track) to the equipment and uniforms looks different. We use batting helmets. We have lights in the stadium so we can play night games (unless you're the Cubs). We've added teams and expanded the MLB.

<Pittsburgh Crawfords Shirt>

Baseball has changed as technology and culture has changed, but the game of baseball remains the classic American pastime it always was.

So too with the Church, and our church in particular. When we first gathered to worship 60 years ago, we were called Knollwood Church of the Nazarene, and we met in a converted barn. Then, several years later, but still before there was a 675, before there was a N Fairfield Mall, when N Fairfield Rd was just a little two-lane country road to nowhere, we bought a farm outside town, in the middle of nowhere and built a new building. Plenty of people thought we were crazy for moving out of town, but we believed God was calling us even if it didn't make a lot of sense. We moved, and became Beaver Creek Church of the Nazarene.

Then the interstate went in, a mall was built, and N Fairfield was expanded to become the main drag in Beaver Creek.

Fifteen years ago, Keven Wentworth was called as the lead pastor here, and he brought another new vision to Beaver Creek Nazarene: that we would become the Beaver Creek Community's church. He envisioned a body of people who would go into the community to show them what Jesus looked like. We wanted to be a people who would Bridge Church to Neighborhood.

Over the last 15 years, we've become that Church. We opened our building to anyone who would use it. We have cultivated a reputation in our community for selfless service, for loving with no strings attached. For prioritizing relationship and earning the right to be heard.

In the process, we've proclaimed the good news about Jesus in both word and action to our community. We've made Jesus famous in Beavercreek, Ohio.

So today, on this 60th anniversary of our first gathering, we should ask not only Where have we come from, but, Where do we go from here? What will the next 60 years of Beavercreek Nazarene look like? Change is scary, but it's part of following God. We're always moving forward. Always doing the next right thing.

It's time to move again. For the last couple of years, our staff and Leadership Team have been praying and studying and wrestling together with what our next right step is. Together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and along with input from many of you, we've agreed on a new vision for the next few years of our church here in Beavercreek.

Our next right step is to **Become a church that connects and engages the unchurched in our neighborhoods.**

We're going to spend the next month unpacking this statement, what it means and what it will look like over the next several years. But this is the bottom line:

45,000 people who don't have a relationship with God live within a 5-mile radius of our building. 45,000. We want to become the Church for those 45,000 persons. We want to do everything we can to connect those people to Jesus, to engage them with the Good News about Jesus.

We can't make anyone follow Jesus. We're not even going to try. That's between them and God. But we *can* arrange the meeting. We can create spaces that welcome the 45,000 and show them Jesus. We can be that bridge between Heaven and our neighborhoods. We can be the picture of God, ambassadors of God's kingdom, the body of Jesus to those 45,000.

It's going to mean doing things differently. If what we were doing now was enough, that number would be a lot smaller. So we're moving forward. We're taking God's invitation to us seriously, saying Yes to God's call to do the next right thing.

You might think 45,000 is too big a number, that the idea that God invites us to join in rescuing the world is too much. That we - Beavercreek Church of the Nazarene, who turn 60 years old today - are too small in the grand 5,000+ year history of God's people to make much of a difference.

But this is God's rescue mission. Not ours. It's God's responsibility to see it through to the end, not ours. God invites us to join. And that means doing the next right thing. The next thing God calls us to do. God is faithful to us. We need only be faithful to God.

So for the next month, we're going to be talking about what our Next Right Thing is as a Church. My challenge to you today is to prayerfully consider for the next month what *your* Next Right Thing is.

How is God calling you to move forward? What is your role in this body of Christ here in Beaver creek, OH?

In the past 60 years, this Church has done amazing things in the name of Jesus. We've taken big risks and though the power of the Holy Spirit accomplished wonders. Just in the past 4 years I've been here, I've witnessed amazing things, from the miraculous growth of Feed the Creek to building a dorm at the Arbre de Vie orphanage in Benin for 30 orphans to the hundreds of tiny acts of faithfulness and service too numerous to name.

This is a church that has faithfully served God for the past 60 years. And we are now here, looking forward, dreaming of what God could do in the next 60 years. 60 years from now, when most of us are gone or very, very old, Beaver creek Church of the Nazarene will be celebrating her 120th anniversary as a Church.

Let them look back on this day and marvel at a gathering of people called together because we have said, You are the Messiah, the son of God! Let them be inspired by the risks we took, the faith we placed in a God who calls us forward. Let them be inspired to bigger dreams and bigger risks than ever because of the choices we make here today.

Prayer of Examine

What's the next right thing?

Benediction

Let us be dreamers and risk-takers, because we serve a God who is bigger than our dreams, and who is faithful to keep us until the end of all things. Let us leave with this blessing from Paul, another risk-taker and big-dreamer. Let this be our prayer as we move into the future with confidence and boldness!

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. -- Ephesians 3:20-21