

When you were younger did you ever play the game or do the rhyme with your hands to represent church? Does anyone know what I am talking about? You might have learned it from your grandma or Sunday School or during recess with your little friends?

“Here is the church, here is the steeple ...open the doors and see all the people.

It’s a fun, harmless rhyme, but it reveals how we think about this thing we do together, this thing we call church. What is church? It’s this [hold up your fists]. It’s the building. And we’re *inside* the building of the church.

For me growing up the building was the church on Sundays or Wednesday nights -We worshiped in the sanctuary, had Sunday school in the classrooms, prepared meals for potlucks. We showed up physically to the building with the people that looked like you, acted liked you and were like you. Church was a physical location, a place we went to be spiritual. It was separate and distinct from my daily life with my friends or at school.

That was fine when I was younger, but as I have grown as an adult and in my career - I teach in a public high school - the old churches' Sunday model that I grew up with just in the building model of the church just being in a building, having a physical address, didn't help me with wanting to show my heart and love for Jesus to other people. I had to keep them both separate, but I had a desire to integrate the two. I wanted a faith that wasn't confined to a physical address, a church that was more than just a building. The problem was there was no model for this for me to follow.

I wanted to share with my students my love for Jesus, but this is forbidden - no doubt you have heard of the law of separation of church and state. I wasn't able to state how I felt about my Christian faith, the message on Sunday or use scripture of the readings in my classroom. The "Church as building" model didn't have a pathway to help me integrate my faith with the rest of my life.

Jesus never intended our lives to be divided. And he never intended the Church to be confined to a physical location. Today, we're going to see that church is a family, a group of people God brings together so that we can be transformed for the sake of the world. And by participating in that family, we come to know God better.

Let's begin by standing together this morning and worshipping this God who makes one family out of all of us!

**Message:**

[Series Master Slide] During the Summer, we're asking one basic question: How do we know God? We began last week with the conviction that, if God is our creator, then God is knowable. God is knowable because God wants to be known and, by becoming human in the person of Jesus, made himself knowable.

We have four major sources of knowing God: Scripture, the record of God's interactions with us throughout history; Reason, our ability to think and learn and discover; Tradition, how others on the journey of faith have known God; and Experience, what we learn about God from our own lives.

Throughout the summer, we're going to dive into each of those four sources of knowing God, and ask how we can know God better. We began with Experience, exploring how we can know God better through what happens in our lives - our private practices and acts of service both in relation to others.

Last week, we began exploring the second source of knowing God we have: Tradition. We saw last week that Tradition can be a dirty word for many of us - it conjures images of arbitrary rules and mindless liturgies. But tradition is also how families pass down values and identity. So we looked at the Church as God's global family. We saw that, when we gather here to worship, we're more than just Catalyst. We're part of an international family that has members from every race, tribe and language. And by getting to know that global family, we know God in a deeper way.

Today, then, we're going to explore how our local faith family helps us know God. Today, we're going to talk about Catalyst!

[Scripture Slide 1] Turn with me to Matthew 16. We're used to thinking about the Church as a building, a place we come on Sundays to worship. And some of Jesus' language lends itself to that. The first time Jesus mentions 'church' is in Matthew's Gospel. It's about halfway through his earthly ministry, and he's generated a lot of buzz. At this moment, he pulls his disciples aside and asks what people are saying about him. Specifically, he asks who people think he is, then who his disciples think he is. It's Peter who speaks up and says Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited savior. And it's in response to Peter's statement of faith Jesus mentions the Church:

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.-- Matthew 16:18-19

Upon this rock I will build my Church. That sure sounds like a building, doesn't it? But here's the problem with that: We're not sure exactly what year this story took place, but it was somewhere around AD 30, give or take a couple of years.

But the first buildings Christians built specifically to use as dedicated meeting places for worship - the first buildings we would call "churches" - were built around AD 250.

So Jesus said, "I'm going to build my church" but then it took over 200 years to make that happen? If church is a building, then was there just no church for the first 200 years of Christianity?

That obviously isn't right. The problem is our association of the word church with the idea of a building. It's something Jesus' original audience wouldn't have confused, because of the word he used.

The word Matthew uses that we translate 'church' is the Greek word *ekklesia* (*ek lay see ah*). A better translation is "assembly".

An "ekklesia" (*ek lay see ah*) is a group called together for a purpose. The Greeks used it to refer most often to political groups meeting. A good example for us today might be a PTA - Parent Teacher Association of a school. What is a PTA?

Imagine a PTA meets in the gymnasium of their school. So the PTA meeting is all these parents and teachers, getting together to discuss how to better the school. Is the PTA the gym itself? Of course not: the gym is used for many groups and purposes; a meeting, gym class, a play and many other events. Imagine the night before the PTA meeting, there was a basketball game in that same gym, and all those same parents and teachers were there to cheer on their team. Same people, in the same building. Is the basketball game a PTA meeting? Of course not. Because the PTA is not a building, and it's not a people. It's a people assembled for a particular purpose.

The assembly of the PTA in this spot is for one purpose only: for parents, teachers and administrators to meet to discuss school business. They are not in that gym to play dodgeball or run laps, but to focus on a plan for this school organization. The building doesn't make it PTA - the people and function and the purpose is what makes them - the PTA.

If the PTA is not a gymnasium, then the Church is not a building. That kind of thinking traps God in the building or limits God to Sundays. We have grown up thinking that, but it is far from the truth. We treat it as if we come on Sunday to get recharged for the week. We "hear" that mentality that we need to be "here" to be in a seat in a pew to find or experience God. That we can only encounter God in this building and that if we want

enough “spiritual juice” to make it through our week until we come back to be recharged the next Sunday, then we have to show up on Sunday.

But if church is not a building but an ekklesia, (*ek lay see ah*) an assembly, then that means we can encounter God everywhere. We can do "Church" anywhere we can assemble.

Just a couple of chapters later, in Matthew 18:19-20, Jesus is teaching us about how to resolve conflict in the Church. He encourages us that we don't have to wait for a specific time and place to come together as his people. Rather, he says: **I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.** -- Matthew 18:19-20

Church - we are talking about a group of people that have been brought together for a certain purpose. It is not the “building” We the church .... We are the people.... Whether it is us serving at Life Message, we are wherever we are doing the work of God of the kingdom that is where we are the church.

As we gather doing the work of the kingdom.

How does the church help me know God?

Some of us hear a message like this and think, “I don't need to go to church to be a Christian.” And it's true - we don't have to go to the building to encounter God. But some of us want to use this as an excuse not to show up. We decide it's not a priority, or it doesn't fit in our lifestyle, and hearing something like this gives us freedom to leave and feel less guilty.

But that was never Jesus' purpose. By calling his people an assembly (rather than a building), he was freeing us not to know God less, but to know God MORE. We're not restricted to encountering God in one place, one time of the week. Rather, we can know God all through our weeks.

Why do we come together for worship? Are we checking a box? Earning spiritual brownie points? That's not why Jesus built the Church. Worshiping together is a valuable source to have a relationship with God. When we skip out, we are cutting ourselves off from one of the opportunities we have to know God better.

If Church is a people, an assembly, then, as Jesus' followers, we are Church when we are praying together, praising, singing, go through the Gospel, checking on each other, participating in a Bible Study, greeting one another, serving, lending a helping hand,

sharing a meal, crying with each other, having accountability with each other, creating a safe space, inviting others to church, reflecting on our weekly discussions and assignments, meeting up with one another, C groups. We are the church, we have endless possibilities to experience church on a daily basis with each other that does not require all of us to be here in this building.

So we don't "need" Sundays? If we don't have to go physically to church on Sundays because the world has changed how we get "churched". Church is literally at my fingertips 24/7. Twenty years ago we couldn't get what we can today—"church/sermon" on demand. You can "church" shop all you want. It has changed over the last 20 years with technology. It is in yours right now in your devices you are holding or that are in your seat, pocket or purse. We can go online at any time and find a service, connect to an app, turn on Christian or Gospel radio, listen to a podcast or read a book to get the word of God.

I am glad we have a church that we can all easily access, where others are watching us right now enjoying their Sunday morning service. When my Dad was sick or when we are traveling it made me feel connected when I was disconnected. But I didn't have the physical presence. That Amanda Bear Hug, the smile from the greeters, the hot coffee prepared, the donuts snuck in, tear offs, the few minutes of passing of the peace all around the room full of fists bumps, head nodes, hugs, handshakes, greetings and smiles!! Nothing replaces the physical presence. Sundays are meant to be the root of what we do!!

Listen you have to listen to others and what they bring to the table. Sunday worship isn't meant to be the only spiritual meal we get all week and get filled up. We should be feasting all week in our Spiritual kitchen, so that on Sundays we all come together and have a giant feast and it is not one person bringing it all to the table. If you don't like what is being served, you are ok because it is not your week or someone else's. Each week someone brings something new to the table, an experience, a problem, a perspective, a victory, a solution. And if you didn't bring something to the table it is alright, you are being fed by your people.

Why does God instruct us to have a Sabbath day? He wants us to gather and be together to prepare our hearts and minds. To care for one another and spend time learning how to care for others. Our gathering for worship shouldn't be the only time of the week we're receiving spiritual nourishment. Rather, it should be the foundation for the rest of a week spent walking with God. Sundays should open our eyes to how God is present with us throughout the week!

**STORY:**

After each Sunday service I am always trying to figure out how I can use what I have learned, what I have been assigned or charged with to use in my daily life at home, in my neighborhood, at work or the grocery store and especially my classroom. I guess that is the teacher in me, I love homework!!

My students know that I am a Christian, they know I love Jesus, but I also tell them I love them if they worship Starbucks, or pray to Krishna, or Allah or the stars and the sun. As long as they are kind, loving and accepting others for who they are that is what I want for them. Many of my students don't believe me when I say this or think I am being silly, but I mean every word I say!! I love them all!! I love them as Jesus loves me and them!!

When JR and I sat down to outline this sermon about the Church as a Building and what ways I had been able to live out the church as a building outside of these four walls the Monster series was the one that jumped out in my mind. The series was during the fall and Halloween time so that fit in perfect with the season around my students and coworkers!! Does anyone remember that series? You know JR loves a great thriller or monster story!!

The Werewolf symbolized anger - when others lash out, when life doesn't go how you would like. This happens a lot for children or really anyone. The Vampires are the people sucking the life out of you!! Do you have a few of those in your lives still or were you able through this series work through relationships that were toxic or habits that needed to be broken. What device was my student using that was taking away from time on their studies, their friends, their family, quality time with themselves taking care of what needed to be done. The Ghosts were regret - if you have to look back on today or in a few years, what would you have regretted not doing or doing as a teenager and high school student? I was able to bring these monsters and the word of Jesus into my classroom without using the words religion, Christian or God.

Each week went on and I felt more and more challenged to weave the teachings from the Sunday morning into my lesson opener or the question of the day. Was I being a little tricky? Maybe? I felt I was being clever and the Spirit supported me the whole way. Many of those monsters I don't remember how I was able to slip into my lesson, conversations or lunch bunches with my students and coworkers. I do know that as the weeks went on the conversations became easier, I became more confident in what I was speaking about and ministering in my own way with others I had been around every day for months or years.

What series or Sunday morning have you been able to use with your family, friends, coworkers, rush hour

Even the shirt I am wearing I wore to school one day!! I hope HR or one of my bosses never watches or listens to this!! For Red Ribbon week we were to wear red one day. And as you can see from this shirt it was red! I questioned wearing it, but a voice inside my head said to go for it! The Holy Spirit will speak to you when you never expect it to! I wore this shirt all day teaching and not a single student asked about it, until the last class period of the day a student asked, "Where should we be Mrs. Reese?" I just looked down at my shirt and said "here!! You will have to look it up later!!" Of course he didn't follow my instruction and immediately pulled out his cell phone and looked up the website.

"Well played Mrs. Reese, well played" is what I got back from that young man that I adored so much! He was brave, always asked questions and he worships in a Temple each week. He knows I love him for who he is and the religion he follows and he cared for me and my bravery that day to wear a shirt he knew I wasn't supposed to, but wanted to share more of me with my students while being a little tricky in the end.

When I thought of Church as a building, I didn't know how to bring my faith into the rest of my life - especially into my classroom. But as I learned that Church is much more than where I go on Sundays, God opened my eyes to how he is present with me everywhere - even in my classroom. I get to be the Church for my kids, for the other teachers in my school. For my kids and husband. For my friends and neighbors. Our worship together here on Sundays is the foundation on which I build my whole week.

Church doesn't happen automatically, though. Remember: the PTA can be in the gym and not be the PTA. So how is this gathering we are doing or this building not just a place for us to hang out? How is this not just a few friends gathering daily for coffee or a meal or in our front yards' or on the playground? The Church is an assembly - a people called for a purpose. What is the *purpose* that makes us "church"? What does it mean to be Jesus's followers? What is our purpose?

Jesus spoke in Matthew 22: **"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" -- Matthew 22:37-39**

When we gather together are we just using it as a gripe session? Am I raising up and praising my friends? Is the way I am participating in this relationship healthy, loving and rewarding for all parties involved? Jesus is freeing us to be present with Him everyday. He is not giving us a blank check to use and cash it in whenever we feel it suits us best. He is giving us the opportunity to grow in His love and grow with each other.

Our purpose: When we gather to discuss the sermon, to pray for each other, when we meet to challenge each other and celebrate each other; when we do this together - we are the church!

Remember that rhyme about the Church? There was another version we learned, a joke version. Here is the church, here is the steeple....open the doors they all ran away. We laughed because of course as kids we didn't always want to go to church. But as I was preparing this message, I couldn't help but think this was maybe an even more appropriate image of the Church than the original.

Where did these people go? At first they were all in the church as a building! God on Sundays! What if we ran out and had recreation together? We "church" outside of these walls through community service, at our jobs, our coffee shops, our restaurants, our ball fields and bookstores. We gather in the building, worship God, remember our purpose. And then God sends us out into the world to be the Church for everyone we meet. Our faith is part of every day, every encounter, every moment.

### **Communion + Examen**

[**Communion Slide**] Communion invites us to be a community who is much more than just a building. When we come to this table, we share in the meal Jesus ate with his followers the night before he was killed. At that meal, he offered them bread and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Take it and eat it to remember me." Later, after the meal was finished, he passed a cup of wine, saying, "Take this. It's my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all."

By making this meal sacred, Jesus made all our meals sacred. Every time we gather, we have the opportunity to acknowledge God is among us, working with us to heal the world. You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion with us. If you're willing to acknowledge how God is working among us and join in, then you're welcome to come to the table.

Before we come to the table, I'm going to lead you in a Prayer of Examen. I'll ask you to reflect in prayer on some questions. Then I'll pray for all of us and as you're ready, you're welcome to come to the table.

1. When in the last week did I participate in Church?
2. When in the last week did I miss or ignore an opportunity to be the Church?
3. Where in the next week will I have a chance to be the Church?

## **Prayer**

God, you have gathered us this morning to remind us that you did not build a physical building. When you said you're building a Church, you meant that you are bringing together a people from all over the world, and that includes us. Your Church is a people who have been transformed by your son Jesus. You call us to be your church not just here, but in every part of our lives.

We approach your table today and confess that far too often, we ignore your call to be your people in the world. Forgive us as we come to the table you have set for us. We receive your meal, and pray these wafers and grape juice become a spiritual food for us. Give us the grace we need to be your people. Open our eyes to see how you are present with us, helping us to be good news to our family, friends, coworkers and neighbors.

We approach your table this morning in the name of your son, Jesus.

## **Assignment + Blessing:**

Thank you to those of you who are regularly supporting Catalyst through your giving and serving. Thank you for making what we do possible!

And again, if you're a guest with us, welcome! We know it can be hard to connect to a new congregation, and we wanted to make it easy to do that. We created an experience called the Newcomers' Lunch that we do once a month. The next one is on August 18. It's right after this, and in about 45 minutes, we feed you, tell you who Catalyst is, and what God is doing here, and we give you a next step to get connected. If you'd like to sign up, just check the top box on the Next Step Card and drop it in the box by the door on the way out!

Now, as you're going: You know the teacher in me that is dreading summer quickly coming to an end needs to give you a homework assignment!!

Do "church" one more time this week: meet with your C group. Meet with friends who you can share life and worship with. Serve with someone, with your family, for someone. Bible study, spend time in the sermon discussion questions. Have coffee or a meal with a fellow church friend. Find the time to worship this week and be present with God everyday in your everyday life!!! We would all love to see how you do Church through the week. Share on your social media with our hashtag #catrow or #rootedincatalyst

Catalyst, go this week into a world teeming with God's love. Take the love of your church family with you, and know that God has gone ahead of you to prepare good works, and goes with you as you work. Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!