

Welcome

Good morning! My name is Sue Sweeney and I'm part of the preaching team here at Catalyst. I've been on the team for a few years now and I've had the opportunity to stand up here and read from the Bible and talk about what God is doing in our lives at Catalyst. If you would have asked me five years ago if I would ever be leading the teaching on Sunday mornings, I would have said, "yeah right!" and then maybe thought later that you were making fun of some how.

All I did was say "yes," when I thought it would probably be better if I said, "no." I don't have time for this! I work full time. I'm a wife and a mom. AND I was in grad school when I first started working with the preaching team. What was I thinking? My husband Jeff and I sort of have this running joke. The weekend before I preach, I always tell him I'm never going to do this again. And then I do it again anyway.

The hours spent studying the Bible, outlining with JR and the other members of the preaching team and sitting alone at my laptop writing and deleting and rewriting my sermon manuscript have all been more rewarding than I could have possibly believed when JR first started talking to me about serving my church in this way. As a result of this experience, I'm challenging myself to understand God's Word more deeply. I'm preaching about things I struggle with myself. Every time I get up here, I feel like a vulnerable mess. Then, after it's over, I know the Holy Spirit has spoken through me. It always seems like the messages that were the most difficult for me personally, were the ones that spoke to people the most.

I do this because it's what our church needs- for the Holy Spirit to speak to Catalyst through a variety of voices and experiences. This is a way that I **serve** in my **church**.

"Church" and "Serve" are words we throw around a lot- very religious language. If you grew up in church like me, there were all kinds of discussions about "serving" and what it means to be the "church." We even had books with quizzes you could take to figure out what the best way to "serve" in your "church" and the building we meet in is called "The Church," but church doesn't really mean the building. .

The truth is, church really is more than just a building and what I've found, more often than not, serving is about giving time and effort toward something you care about a lot and think maybe somebody else would surely be better help than you, but you do it anyway. It's about what others need, not what you need.

Today, JR and I are going to talk to you about why God wants us to serve- what the Bible tells us it looks like and how serving in the church is more than just religious language we throw around.

Let's stand and sing together.

Message

This is the season of Epiphany, when we celebrate that the God who came to us at Christmas is not only for us, but for the whole world. This year, our Epiphany series is called "Church Words with Friends". We're going to be exploring some of those words Christians use that can be confusing. Maybe they're words like "Gospel" that are unique to Christianity. Or words like "grace" or "blessed" that pretty much everyone uses, but no one is exactly sure what they're supposed to mean. Our goal is to understand our faith better so that we can be better conversation partners with our friends and neighbors outside the Church.

And since friends are so nice, we've done two words each week. By learning these 'church words' together, we'll uncover new dimensions to our faith.

We began with God & Trinity, and discovered that when we say God is Trinity, we're saying God is most essentially self-giving love. God created us to join in giving ourselves in love to each other. Next, we talked about Gospel and Incarnation and saw that what makes Jesus worthy of our worship, what proves he is a god worth following, is that he demonstrates his love by becoming one of us, giving up his divine privileges and sacrificing himself for us. After that came Wrath and Atonement, and we saw that the cross isn't about God taking a Xanax or punishing Jesus instead of us. Rather, it's about God loving us enough to save us from ourselves.

Next, we explored the scandal of Grace and Blessed, and we saw that the life God saves us *for* is a life where we are present to God and to each other. After that, we looked at what we're saved *for* with two \$20 words, Salvation and Sanctification.

Last week, Debbie connected the three eternal virtues, Faith, Hope and Love, to help us see what a life of faith looks like.

And that brings us to today, our final installment of this series. We're ending with a look at who we are together, with a word that probably all of us has already said at least a couple of times today:

Church.

What does 'church' mean? Well, most of us will point to this building, at least at first. It's the obvious first move when we say, "Let's get ready for church," or "We're going to church."

Church is a building.

If we think even for a couple of moments, we move pretty quickly past the church-is-building idea. After all, if you showed up to an empty building, you wouldn't say, "Church is fine." You'd go, "uh oh... is it Saturday? What's going on?" Because church is more than the building. It's an organization made of people.

But most of us don't push this far enough. Because most of us, though we get 'church-as-org-', think of the other kinds of organizations we know. We might compare church to a corporation, a top-down organization with the pastor at the top, sort of like a CEO, other leaders who are like a board of directors or VPs.

[Scripture Slide 1] Church is actually better than that. Turn with us to Matthew 16. This is the place where Jesus himself establishes the Church, so it's a good place to begin our investigation. (It's so good, you've heard this before if you've been around Catalyst - this is key to understanding what we're about here.)

So here is Jesus, quizzing his disciples on whether or not they've figured out he's the Messiah yet:

Jesus 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. -- Matthew 16:15-18

There's so much good stuff here, but hang out on Jesus' response to Peter: "You are the rock, and on this rock I will build my CHURCH."

There's our word. The Greek there is the word *ekklesia*, and it's a word the Greeks used to talk about public assemblies - the word literally means "the called-out ones". So the idea is that an *ekklesia* is a specific group of people called out of the larger sea of people. They're called for a particular task. So, like a senate gathering.

Or, my favorite example, a PTA.

What is a PTA? It's a group of parents that meet together, usually in the school's gym, to support the school.

Again, it's pretty obvious the PTA isn't a building - they're meeting in the school, which is primarily used for education of children. And let's say the gym's in use that night so they meet at the community center - they're still the PTA, even though they're not in the "right" building.

Or, let's say the gym's in use for the championship basketball game, and all the parents and teachers are there, in the gym, for the game.

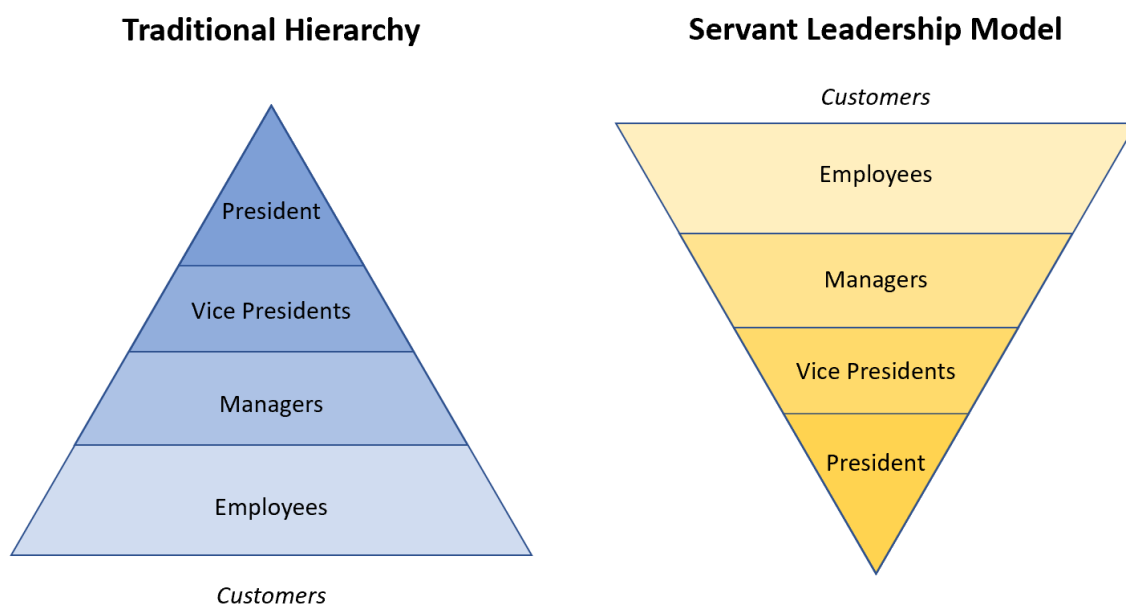
You wouldn't in a million years call that a PTA meeting, even though all the right people are in the right building.

Because they're there to watch a basketball game and scream their heads off.

What makes an *ekklesia* is a group of people called together around a common cause.

A church isn't a building. And a church isn't a leader. A church is all of us, called together around our common cause - proclaiming that we follow Jesus as God's chosen one.

So, that brings us to the word SERVE. It's another word we throw around a lot and it has a context outside of the church as well. Maybe in your workplace, you hear about "servant leadership." Maybe you've seen this image like this before in a meeting led by the big boss. I know I have.



It's a nice idea. Things like this can definitely become cliché- just lip service without any meaningful action. For example, you know the big boss really has no idea what it is you do all day at work and if they knew what it was and had to do it, they probably wouldn't want to do it either.

But, there are times when it's used sincerely. I once had a boss who was truly a servant leader. For her, there was never any task too small or "beneath her." If it needed to get done and she could do it, she would do it. Even if it meant moving office furniture herself when the warehouse couldn't come out or staying late to run the copy machine. This is what REAL servant leadership looks like. It's about being close enough to the work that needs to be done to know what people actually need help with.

What distinguishes what God truly means by "serving" from what we sometimes see as selfishness, thinly disguised as "serving others" is not just about having "good intentions." It's not about what "I" want to do as a service, it's about finding out what people really need.

[Scripture Slide 2] Turn in your bibles or tap in your Bible app to Matthew 20:28.

Here, we see the best example in the person of Jesus. Even though Jesus was a king, even though he had the power of God, he spent his time serving others instead of being served by others.

What was his service to others? He worked miracles. He fed the multitudes with seven loaves of bread and some fish. He instantly made the blind see and the lame walk. He did a lot of great things, but he also did a lot of small, simple things too- things that made a big difference.

Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” -- Matthew 20:28

He already had everything he needed to serve others. Ultimately, Jesus did for us only what he could do. He died to give us new life.

Maybe in our lifetimes, we won't be able to turn the water into chardonnay or manage to feed the hungry multitudes with just one bag of fish sandwiches. But, there is something we can easily do that Jesus did. He was aware of others around him. He took the time to sit by the outcast women at the well, to visit the sick, and to talk to those who it wasn't considered "appropriate" to talk to. We can do this too, through the church.

When we think of church as a corporation, with the pastor-as-ceo, top-down model that comes perhaps more naturally to our minds, we end up with churches where the vast majority of us are pretty passive. It's the pastor, or maybe the pastor and leadership or staff, who do most of the ministry, the work.

But according to the church leaders of the first churches, that's not how churches worked at all. Take this instruction from the author of Ephesians:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. -- Ephesians 4:11-12

Pastors and teachers? Our job is to equip the whole church to do the work.

Pastors don't *do* the work (or, rather, we don't do it alone). Instead, we spend our time trying to make sure you have what you need to do the work.

And that word "work" there in verse 12? It's the word we translate "minister". In other words, pastors aren't the only ministers. If you belong to Jesus, you're a minister. We're all ministers because Jesus invites us all to serve - the same way Jesus serves us.

So, what does that look like? Should we start running some outside projects. Let's run a food pantry out of here, or a medical clinic. That sounds awesome! But who has time to run a whole non-profit organization on top of working and taking care of friends and family?

We're not saying this morning that you shouldn't open up a non profit. It's not about going to do "extra stuff." We must be awake to what God has prepared.

This is why Catalyst has adopted the pilgrimage model of serving. We don't reinvent the wheel; we look for where God is at work and we join in. (Life Message, Mosque friends, Trunk or Treat, etc)

But what does that look like in our individual lives? To be a minister yourself means you recognize that God is already at work right where you are, preparing ways for you to serve. So you listen, and respond.

It's about taking a few moments to check in on someone who is going through a hard time. It's offering a bed and a meal. Or you have that quiet insistence inside you every time you interact with that person in the coffee shop or cubicle or the customer you deal with regularly.

But how do I figure out what God is calling me to do?

It's counterintuitive, but one thing God uses is actually what makes us mad. It's true! Often the things that trigger real, righteous injustice in us are the things that God wants us to lean into. You know as well as I do that there's way too much injustice in the world big and small to be equally bothered by everything. And that's okay. Find the problems that really burn you and lean into those things.

(And of course we have to be careful we're not reacting out of hurt, trauma, bias or other things that produce unrighteous anger.) But, do you get really angry when you see someone left out or excluded? That probably means you have a special calling to hospitality. Are you frustrated by people who don't take faith seriously? You might have a special calling to encouragement or prayer. Are there certain justice issues that get you really fired up? Maybe God is calling you specifically to get involved in those.

What makes us angry is a good clue to understanding our passions - you don't get too worked up about what you don't care about. Our passions can guide us to our gifts.

[Scripture Slide 3] This is an opportunity for us to be intentional about what God is calling us to do. Turn or tap over to 1 Peter 4. We're going to read verses 7b-11a.

The good news is, we may not think we have any spiritual gifts, but we do. We may not think we have anything particularly special to offer the world, but God's Word tells us otherwise. We

have everything we need to get started, we just have to say “yes” when the world tells us to say “no.”

Let’s read together,

Be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 4:7b-11a

JR, you talked earlier about how the church is not just a building, but the Greek word is *ekklesia*, We are people coming together around a common cause- the people of God. And we are supplied with strength and energy to serve. We have everything we need already, we just need to share it cheerfully and with love. This is what we do on Sunday mornings. We come together, to share what we have with one another. To do it with so much love.

Friends, we are all the church. You and I, gathered here together to celebrate our lord, Jesus. We don’t stop being the Church when we leave this building. And that means we have the opportunity every single day to show the world who Jesus is.

We do that by serving, the same way Jesus serves us.

Our C-Groups are doing monthly serves - that’s a good place to begin. And we have some regular all-church opportunities like the Trunk or Treat and our Thanksgiving and Christmas projects. But our hope is that you’re not waiting for the organization to schedule times for you to serve.

Because God is filling your everyday, ordinary life with opportunities to show all kinds of people the generous, self-giving love you’ve learned from God.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] We can only imitate what we have received.

1. Asdf
2. When next week will you be open to being aware of the needs of others around you?
3. Asdf
4. Asdf

Assignment + Blessing

Our prayer is that this week, you'll ask God to help you be aware of the opportunities you have to see God at work around you.