

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Why Go to Church?

1st Corinthians 12:12-27

Sunday, September 18, 2022

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When you drove to worship this morning, you passed by the houses of neighbors and friends who had no thought of going to church. Some were sipping their morning coffee and scrolling through Facebook. Some were still sleeping. Others were headed to the golf course or getting their kids ready for a soccer game. Why don't they go to church?

Ironically, religious polls show that most Americans believe in God and consider themselves "spiritual." So, where are they? Why aren't they here?

Of course, we also know many folks who used to go to church before Covid hit. And, now, well, they have gotten out of the habit. Some feel they can go about their lives without church. They figure, "Well, I have gone this long without it, why not spend my weekends doing other things I enjoy." Is it really that important? Besides, I can always watch services online.

Well, you and I have heard several reasons or excuses why people don't come to church. Today, I am going to lift up the top 6 reasons people say they don't go to church and respond to them. Now this is a special sermon today. This is your sermon because I am very much aware that I am preaching to the choir today. You are here! So, my hope is that this sermon will equip you to share why the church is important to you and why it should be important to others.

#1 - "I believe in God; I am spiritual. I just don't believe in organized religion."

I hear this quite a bit. In fact, not a month goes by when I don't hear this a few times. If I am in a salty mood, my response is usually, "You don't believe in organized religion? What you would like instead? Unorganized religion?"

The truth is unorganized religion is no match for organized evil! Evil is out there and believe me it is organized. How are we to overcome it if we are unorganized? We romanticize organized crime, don't we? We have TV shows, movies and books glorifying organized crime. We think it is fascinating. Yet, some people are turned off by the people of God organizing themselves to bring hope and healing to the world?

When there is a natural disaster, we expect FEMA and The Red Cross to be organized. When there is a threat to our country, we expect our military to be organized. When our country has needs, we expect the government to be organized. When we go to the bank to withdraw money, we expect it to be organized. When we go to our favorite grocery store or restaurant, we expect it to be organized, or we will go to another place that is. When we check into the hospital for surgery, we expect the doctors and nurses to be organized! Yet, when the one institution in the world that is called and ordained by God to heal the world gets organized people are turned off by it?

Given the sufferings of this world and what God has called the church to do, the church should be the most organized institution in the world! Because we have the most important job in the world – to be vessels of God's love, hope and healing!

A close reading of history shows that when God does anything significant in this world it is not done through politics, talk radio, fads, or through secular institutions; it is done through the organized body of Christ.

#2 - "The Church is filled with a bunch of hypocrites."

I love this one. When people I don't know well give this reason, I often respond with, "I hear you. You know that church down the street, Johns Creek UMC? I know the biggest hypocrite in that church." Usually, their eyes get big. I say, "It's me. Hi, I am Charley Reeb and I am the senior pastor."

Of course, I have also used the old line, "There is always room for one more!"

But this is a popular one. Maybe you have a neighbor or relative that comes over to your house every holiday and criticizes the church. Perhaps they bring up the same litany – the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, the corruption of clergy, etc. Maybe some of them tell you they used to go to church but they got their fingers caught in the machinery of the

church and have never been back. Someone got mad at them or they got mad at someone and, to their surprise, they discovered that the church is made up of imperfect people.

Allow me to let the cat out of the bag for you this morning. The church is made up of imperfect people because, as the old saying goes, “the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” There is no such thing as the perfect church. I often find people who are searching for the perfect church. My response is always the same: “There is no such thing as the perfect church. But if you find the perfect church and join it, it will not be perfect anymore!”

Why did Jesus come? Think about it. Jesus did not come for perfect people. He came for imperfect people. You don’t need a bath if you are clean. Jesus came to seek and save the lost – to bring healing and wholeness to broken people. The church is not perfect, but we know the one who is perfect and he is working in our lives.

Even though the church is not perfect, she is still the greatest thing God has going for Him in this world and if God is going to do something profound in this world He will do it through His church. Through our imperfections, the power of God is revealed.

#3 - “I can experience God on the golf course or in the mountains or on the beach.”

I have doubts about this one because I am a golfer and, believe me, God is far from me on the golf course!

This one always reminds me of that old joke about the preacher who wanted to play golf on Sunday instead of preach. He called his associate on Saturday night and feigned sickness. His associate graciously agreed to preach. The next morning the preacher got up, threw his clubs into his car and drove to the golf course. When he got to the first par 3 he struck the ball perfectly and it dropped into the hole for a hole in one! St. Peter looked up at God and asked, “Why would you allow one of your ministers who is playing hooky to get a hole in one?” God replied, “Peter, who is he going to tell?”

Number three is a popular. I hear it quite a bit. I don’t doubt it. I believe we can experience God in creation. However, sooner or later in life each of us will need the wisdom, support, love, connection and accountability of others. And when that need arises where do we go? I never heard of a golf course that saved a marriage. I never heard of a mountain that helped someone overcome an addiction. I never heard

of a beach that helped someone find answers to their most troubling questions. I never heard of boat that helped someone develop a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. But you know what? I know that the church has done all these things!

What happened after 9/11? Did people run to the mountains, play golf, or go to the beach? No! They went to church! People who never darkened the door of a church before in their lives flocked to church. Why? Because they needed hope. They needed the touch and love of understanding people. Most of all, they needed a strength and a wisdom beyond themselves. They needed God. And they knew the church was the only institution in the world that could provide what they needed.

The questions are always the same: Why do bad things happen to good people? Where is God when it hurts? What is the purpose of my life? Where is the answer to the riddle of suffering? Why is hate so strong? How come good people go bad? Where do you go when you have these questions? You go to church? You need to connect to real loving people who know a real loving God.

Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of a 97-year-old friend who is having trouble now with her “short-term-memory,” but her long-term-memory is excellent.

“She told Barbara of a time when she was a child that she and her girlfriends decided to climb up Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. They had a great time, but they stayed too long. Darkness and fog came in quickly. They had no flashlights, so they ended up holding each other’s hands and moving down the mountain together in a human chain. They sometimes debated which path they should follow, but the one thing they did not do was let go of each other.

“The woman concluded by saying: ‘It was so dark and foggy. Sometimes all I could see was the hand behind me and the hand in front of me. We made it by holding onto one another’” (Story told by Rev. James Moore).

If ever there ever was a parable of the church that is it. We cannot make it in this world alone. We can’t thrive as followers of Christ alone. We make it by holding onto each other. This is why the church is so important. We need each other! We as a church, we as human beings, make it by holding on to each other.

#4 – “I can be a Christian without going to church.”

Sure, you can be a Christian without going to church, but not a very good one! Can you be married and not live with your spouse? Sure, but that marriage won't last long. Can you be a member of a gym and never go? Sure, but you won't get healthy and strong. Can you be a member of the team and not go to practice? Sure, but you will let the team down on game day.

I don't know any Christian who is growing and serving effectively who is not active in a local church. In fact, I challenge anyone to find me one person who is a healthy Christian who is not active in a church. We will never achieve Christian maturity apart from Christian community. We need more than our own frame of reference. We need more influence than just a few like minded friends. We need the church.

For many of us, our default mode is to go into our echo chambers and be surrounded by folks who see things the same way we do. We need the church broaden our minds and souls and push us beyond our comfort zones.

Besides, there is no such thing as an isolated Christian. It is biblically impossible. Once you receive Christ as Savior you are grafted into the body of Christ. Paul addresses this issue in 1st Corinthians 12 when he tells us the church is like a body and the ear never says to the foot that it has no need for it. No, we all play a key role in the body of Christ and we need each other. When you became a Christian, you were put on the team and assigned a position.

Being a Christian is like being a grit. You can't order just one grit! They all come together. It is the same way with God's people. You can't get just one. We all come together. We are all connected and must hold on to each other. That's the body of Christ.

#5 – “I can worship online.”

I am grateful for technology. I am glad that people can join us for worship online. I am very aware that there are folks who, for various legitimate reasons, cannot worship in person. I am thankful that streaming our worship services is an option for them. It helps them stay connected.

But I also know there are many many people who can worship in person but choose not to. They believe watching a service on a screen is the same as going to church. And nothing could be further from the truth!

As someone has said, “You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have community of faith on your sofa.

You can't experience the power of worshipping together with a community of believers on your sofa. Christians aren't consumers. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We do life together. The church needs you and you need the church.”

Yes, you can worship Jesus anywhere. Yes, the Spirit of God is with you everywhere. Yes, you don't need to be in a sanctuary to worship Jesus.

But I will tell you what every Christian does need. We need to worship Jesus together with other people! All kinds of people. Older people. Younger people. People who can challenge us. People that we can challenge. People who can encourage us. People we can encourage. People who see things differently than we do who stretch us spiritually. What bring us all together is our love for Jesus Christ and our desire to serve him. The body of Christ can't be a body if we are not worshipping and serving together.

You need the church and the church needs you. Why? Because none of us are strong enough to follow Jesus on our own!

What's more is that there are special and powerful ways we connect with each other and connect with God together that can only happen when we are face to face. We need to shake hands and hug each other. We need to ask each other how life is. We need to look one another in the eyes and see if someone is hurting or needs encouragement or needs to talk or needs prayer. None of that can happen watching a screen.

We need Jesus and we need each other. We need the church.

#6 - “They are always asking for money.”

This is my all-time favorite because it is my favorite one to respond to. When people say this to me I often reply, “Yeah, I hear ya. Hey, where did you go to college?” And down here in Georgia I often get the reply, “The University of Georgia! Ruff, ruff, ruff! Go Dawgs! We have had season tickets to the games for years. My children went there. We are all Dawgs! Go Dawgs!”

Then I say, “When you are at the game cheering or tailgating or moving your kid into the dorm, have you ever said, ‘The University of Georgia is always asking for my money!?’” Never! “When you get

emails, calls and letters from UGA asking you as an Alum to contribute, have you ever said, 'That school is always asking for my money?'" Never!

Sometimes I will also say this to them, "When the Girl Scouts come running after you with their cookie order forms, have you ever said, 'Those kids are always asking for my money!?' Heck no! You will eat a sleeve of Thin Mints with joy!

Yet, when the Church of Jesus Christ, the most important institution in the world, the only eternal institution in the world that has the most important job in the world, needs resources and money to function, people get all bent out of shape?! Help me. Help me understand that."

I will never apologize for boldly asking people to give their money and gifts to God. We are the only bank account God has. If we don't give, something God wants done does not get done!

I know many of you here today feel the same way I do. Deep down you want to be committed to a partnership that is making a difference in the world. Deep down you want to be part of a body of people that is transforming this world with the love of Christ. And you are proud to give your resources to make it happen.

A colleague of mine talks about the time he was sitting in an airport in San Juan, Puerto Rico waiting for an airplane to take him home. He says, "I noticed these two little kids, one about eight and one about six get into a fight with one another. They were squabbling back and forth. At first I tried not to notice them, but when the skirmish became a slugfest, I began asking out loud 'Where are the parents of these kids?' Nobody seemed to know. As the bigger boy finally got the little one and began to beat his head into the tile floor, I stepped out of the boarding line and went over, pulled them apart, and settled the fight.

"A little later on the plane, I began to ask questions about that experience. Doesn't the government have any laws against child neglect? Couldn't schools teach children to behave? Would some counseling eventually help that kid work through his unresolved anger? Isn't there some business that would finally provide him a job?"

"I was going down my litany and then it dawned on me. All that is good and wonderful but can anybody transform a human being, except God? It would take a miracle for that kid to have a chance. It would take the love of Jesus to heal his wounds. It would take the power of the Holy Spirit for him to have a future. Only God can mend a heart. Only God can make us new again." "And then the question became obvious. Why is the Church waiting for somebody else to do its work?"

The inscription on the Statue of Liberty says, "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Those words need to be inscribed on the door of every church. That is what the Church is about. Why go to church? Why be active in a church? Because deep down we desire to connect with real loving people and we desire to connect to a real loving God. And we want to help others make that life changing connection too.



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