

What is the church?

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[0 : 0 0] something and um this passage which we are going to be looking at a lot over the next um six or seven weeks is is a lot like that glad i've got my glasses um so acts 2 44 to 47 john um preached on this sorry 42 to 47 john preached on this three weeks ago and at the time you know i thought oh does that mean i can't preach on it in three weeks time and i thought no if god has put that passage on my heart then that's what we will look at so let me read this to you it's called the fellowship of the believers so this is just after um paul has preached at pentecost they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship the breaking of bread and to prayer everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles all of the believers were together and had everything in common they sold property and possessions give to anyone who had need every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising god and enjoying the favor of all the people and the lord added to their number daily those who were being saved i have the first um i'm i'm quite a visual person so i like to look at things when i when i speak and actually i quite like it when when other people speak if i can you know look at some images so over the next um six or seven weeks we're going to look at some of those disciplines of the early church the characteristics the things that they did so we are going to look at the word of god word uh which which we can study we're going to look at bible study we're going to look at prayer we're going to look at giving and our generosity we're going to look at our attitude towards life and its ups and its downs we're going to talk about fellowship and we're going to talk about evangelism how we introduce people who don't know jesus the good news and today by way of introduction we're going to think about what god intended the church to be if we're honest what it is and what part we play in the church because ultimately we are church so um i'm i'm a little bit of a nerd i like understanding where words come from because i think there's a lot of power in understanding what's behind the word and the word church is is a kind of strange word um the word in english people argue about where it came from there's there's a german word which is called kirch and i wish manfred was up here not downstairs because he could tell me how badly i'd pronounce that but this is a word which means house of the lord it's a small l in how they meant it so it was it was a gathering place where people came together to meet it didn't have to have anything to do with god but it was called the house of the lord and then there's another theory that it came from an anglo-saxon word which i kind of quite like this theory it comes from an anglo-saxon word which means circle or circus because i think sometimes that's not a bad analogy but apparently it's because the early church were known that they met in a circle and that their fellowships happened in circles as opposed to in straight lines maybe something we should think about actually both of those words are poor translations of the word in greek which uh we uh call um church nowadays in the bible so the word is ekklesia and um i love the fact that the first person who translated bible into english anyone remember his name pardon is it bead

not tyndale okay i like the fact that tyndale who a thousand years after bead translated the bible did not use the word church to translate ekklesia if you look at his translation and all the way through it says the word congregation or gathering a bringing together of people and that's a much truer form of the greek word and i know that all of you are going to go yes i know church is the people not the building and that's good but we sort of need to understand i think the significance of what that means because it means that wherever god's people are joining together that's where the church is early church didn't have the early gathering congregation didn't meet in a building set aside for the purpose they met in houses they met at their work benches after work they met in marketplaces they probably met in cavernas or restaurants i'm not sure they met on the football pitch but that's the brazilian under 20 football team who when they win join together and praise god that is church and it's a really important thing i think for us to realize that it doesn't stop becoming church when we walk out of here it doesn't cease to become church when some people who are currently trying to follow god are joined by those who aren't it becomes church when those who are trying to follow god are present and so maybe we need to think about what we mean when we say it'd be really good if i could get my friend into church because actually where we are gathered together that is the church the church is meeting now i can tell you in um brockwell park because that's where the youth group are the church will be meeting at a quiz in march and i encourage you to come because there will probably be more people who don't normally come to church at that event you will see here on a sunday the church are meeting at knit and natter and warm monday and moonbeams wherever we are we are a church there's a lot of it's not a family an all-age service but i still thought i'd do a little quiz for you um i love the names that are given the different groups of animals when they come together so i've got a quick quiz for you to shout out answers starting easily lions are called a pride fantastic this one's a bit more tricky bears are called a maybe they're actually called a sloth i quite like that what about hippos this one's a bit mean what a bloat of hippos what about giraffes neck nearly it's actually called a tower of giraffes a little bit more you know wise maybe owls parliament yes because they're obviously very wise creatures what about uh sort of stark contrast do you know what our parrots are called i love this one i actually went to a pet shop with uh elijah the other day and there were parrots that had been like free just free in the pet shop it's called a pandemonium of parrots ambush of lemurs and apparently it's because there's only a set number between 15 and 25 of them get together and they call it an ambush and they go and ambush other ambushes of lemurs they're very territorial what about the last one that i know so it can be called a bloom but does anyone know what ladybirds are called it's called a loveliness of ladybirds isn't that lovely now now i wonder if we went down

to the market in herne hill today and people aren't going to know the word ekklesia i wonder what word they would use to describe us as a body a congregation of believers here parliament confusion what a crowd's called don't go there sorry a pandemonium i i don't know i hope and the bible teaches that they should call us a loveliness because that is how they will know you are my followers not based on our theology other than love for each other i um when i was younger i say um i used to go with a friend of mine who's an artist called charlie we used to go into schools and um for some reason uh they let us take the re lessons in schools and actually one of the things we asked was that the teacher went out we were in this um very posh school i don't know how we got it it's called gordiston up in scotland and um and we were taking an re lesson and charlie who's just so creative said um all right i'm going to write down all the words you want to call out uh and i want you to just you know just tell me the first thing that comes to mind when i say church and he said it in a slightly you know church and the words that came out were actually quite harsh and charlie promised to write all of them down which is why i can't read all of them out to you they weren't very nice words always hypocritical judgmental and then charlie said and now i want you to use words that describe jesus the list is quite different and that made me stop and it upset me we thought about why that was we spoke about how we are really poor reflections of jesus but to know who we are helps us become who god wants us to be i was um i was listening to a uh podcast a sermon by a um a guy who preaches in america and um and he was challenging his church and and i think today god wants to encourage us he wants to challenge us as well and he wrote this uh so this is his words not mine he he said uh he he read acts 2 uh 44 to 47 in uh what's called the new century version and then he did another one he said i want to read you what maybe is the 21st century version and it goes like this it says they were devoted to their comfort happiness personal goals and dreams people were amazed at how easily they judged others rarely tried to lend a helping hand very few of the believers were together and when they were they fought about things if they sold anything they used the money to buy better things for themselves they claimed to love god but they didn't really love each other so they felt lonely empty and downcast as a result most people disliked them no one wanted to join them and very few lives would change now i'm not saying that that's where our church is he wasn't saying that's where his church was i think if you read acts 2 44 to 47 numbers being added to daily people in the community saying wow look at the love they have for each other all of us have somewhere to travel and it matters because we we are the church and today we're going to think about four things that it means for us to be in church like a good baptist they don't all just start with the same letter they all start with the word in okay so i want us to think about what it means to be in the church the first thing is that we are invited we are invited into god's family we're a gathering of people who have been called out and ecclesia means people who are called out none of us are born into this all of us have had to be created new to become part of this jesus made it really clear that it was

something that we chose come and follow me jesus said and i love the way through the gospels that it describes jesus's disciples as being followers not got theirs it's a present continuous term meaning that until we meet him in glory we won't have got there and the church is not sorted people he said he didn't come for the righteous or the sinners or the sick he befriended and invited the kind of people that others rejected rough old fishermen tax collectors prostitutes adulterers criminals they were welcome in his gathering he asks us to do the same his command to the disciples was we call it the great commission go into the all the world and make of all people groups invite them come and follow me and at the beginning of the church it was exactly the same i didn't read the beginning of acts acts one but um jesus before he's taken up into heaven tells his disciples and i think it i would have loved to have seen their faces as he sort of went through this where he said you know i want you to go and be my witnesses and they go okay yep we can do that in jerusalem i can imagine them going okay all right you know they did just kill you but you know at least it's amongst the jews and then he said and in samaria and they probably weren't quite so happy it's like asking a republican to go and be really nice to a democrat or you know the jews and samaritans were not friends at all and in the rest of the world which to them was the roman world the most evil empire that they could imagine that's who they were asked to go and preach to and i love that earlier on in acts 2 it talks about how they were filled with the spirit and how they could speak in tongues and people you know sort of discuss what that might mean and but for today i i just want to think about it this way i think this is god desperate for everybody to be able to hear his message in their own language in the way that they understand god in in in acts 2 it says that why do we hear them speaking in our own tongues now i'm going to embarrass myself by trying to say some of the places they came from some of us are from parthia media and elam others are from mesopotamia judea cappadocia pontus asia some other impronounceable places but he lists like 14 different places and i think god was so desperate that the church should spread it should spread so that everybody can hear a message in the way that it makes sense to them and it says that 3 000 people were added to their number that day it doesn't say that they were all suddenly completely sorted that they'd lost all of their habits that they had beforehand but it doesn't say that they were treated like sort of apprentice believers either they weren't given you know when you pass your driving test what's the thing they give you know it's like is it a p on your car it doesn't say that they were given a green d you know they were integrated they were taken into the body into the ecclesia instantly and if you read paul's letters to the church it's pretty clear that not all of them sorted their lives out very quickly there were some really jacked up people in the church they were

still part of the church and in ephesians 2 i'm i'm so glad that um you read that whole chapter i just love that chapter i know it's it's a long and slightly complicated chapter to read it talks about the bringing together of two people groups into one body it talks about in him how we too are being built together into this amazing body and it was jew and gentile man and woman free person roman citizen and slave all in this beautiful body together what easily happens in in all churches i think and it happened to the church in in acts and i certainly think it happens to the church today is that it starts very outward looking but then maybe it's a little bit like gravity there's this pull in which always happens in people groups i think which tends to pull things around us it makes it about our satisfaction our uh our needs and it's maybe not surprising that this happens um you know church leaders rarely get complaint letters people who don't come into the church so we tend to look in on ourselves and the and the church uh in in in um jerusalem and the early church was was no different there was a whole argument about how jewish gentiles needed to become in order to really belong in the body 613 laws in the old testament some thought that they had to keep some of which some of them quite hard go through with and i love the fact that it's james the brother of jesus who says this we should not make it difficult the gentiles who are turning to god we shouldn't make it all about ourselves we should be welcoming people in and i wonder as a church body here it how welcoming we always are to those who want to come in i i have um i have some friends who over the years i've i've invited to come in and um uh there's one i'm going to try really hard not to say their names because this is being recorded one friend of mine he's welsh uh we used to play a lot of golf together we often used to play on our on a sunday afternoon and we had church lunch here and it really saddened me that i said come in you know just have some dessert marion i've just said this uh this person really loves dessert but he said i i don't want to come in look at me he was wearing his neither of us were particularly good at golf and so they're covered in grass stains didn't want to come in because he wasn't dressed properly that's just an outward thing there's another friend of mine who um we love watching football together we we often spend new year's eve together and it was about three years ago we were spending new year's eve together actually we were spending new year's day together if i'm honest it was about two o'clock in the afternoon we're drinking some very very good rum and this friend of mine believes in god he um he says i i look up at the stars and i just know there's a creator and he wants to get to know him he said to me he said i you know this year tim i'm gonna start coming to church with you he said i just need to sort out these problems in my life first and i tried to say no that's not the way that it should be but something in him it's a learned behavior for some reason he thought that he needed to clean up before he could come and be part of it when we look at who hung around with jesus who flocked to him what a contrast it was the sinners who went to jesus church should be the same this should be the easiest place for somebody to come in and say i've got a drug habit i have a

[20 : 20] pornography habit i drink too much and yet maybe that's the last place people would come i um i spent about six months working at a working at a youth group uh in fulham near some of the projects there and um we seriously considered putting a metal detector up for the kids to come into the youth group that's the kind of youth group i want to be part of where it's not safe because the people who want to come in don't know jesus okay we are invited and we should be an invited community don't worry the next one's a much faster and i can see uh the next one we are i'm influential the word influential i think has got really bad rap over the last few years you think about influencers and you think about people on youtube who you know are given money to bog tact but the bible makes it really clear that we are influential for god's glory early church were a really close-knit community it says they had everything in common what happened to one affected another it had this mutual dependency on each other one gave and somebody else received and we often think you know it's all about the person who gives and the person who receives is somehow not influential but nothing could be further from the truth in in god's ecclesia in his gathering um a few of us from this church and uh perex myself uh joseph um and rob uh uh our trainee um our minister in training from spurgis went to ukraine um on what i will never call again a mission trip we went to go and bless people by giving them bags of groceries is largely what we did and offering to pay for them now i i know that we gave them bags of groceries and i think they were blessed i believe the blessing that we received in return was far greater talking and the privilege of being able to pray with someone who can't afford arthritis drugs and asks you to pray with them the things that they taught me about faith i will i will never forget it's not just those physical things it's how we support and love and encourage each other in the church i can look back over my life and think of so many examples of people in the church that have encouraged me when i was um i wasn't very um good always when i was uh a kid in sunday school we we used to have a balcony in our church and all the kids went up in the balcony and the sunday school teachers generally were down uh on the on the ground floor and there was a woman who was in her 70s teaching me when i was between like five and 10 called mrs fisk mrs fisk always wore a hat and we used to roll up pieces of paper and try to flick them from the balcony into mrs fisk's hat she knew we were doing this and she'd take it off shake it and laugh and i remember thinking what is it that makes this old woman want to spend time with me on a sunday morning i could think about a man called cecil who was our church secretary actually who wrote to me every single week i was at university and when i was at university i made the prodigal son look like a faithful follower he wrote to me and told me he loved me told me how much he valued my friendship and i've i've i've seen it here as well how we can encourage each other without even saying a word christmas day um i i did the service um and i'd had a really hard week real now i know these are real first world problems aren't they we had uh we'd been planning for about three years to go um on holiday to go on a snowy holiday because my three boys told me

they'd never played in the snow and we have been planning for three years since before the pandemic to go to finland on holiday and um on the 23rd of december so we were going to go on the 2nd of january on the 23rd of december alison and i were driving back from my younger brothers we both had really busy days at work um alison was going meant to go to work the next day and um and alison said where are the boys passports and and i saw upstairs we got home we said maybe we should just check the dates on them we checked the dates on them and elijah's was running out and so i spent all of the 24th of december a day which i'd set aside to get ready the service christmas day um i had to get up early in the morning i had to get to a post office get a paper form for the passport get it signed thank you richard jump in the car drive to peterborough hand it in drive all the way back having been told your passport will never be there on time we have no kitchen at home at the moment so in the evening i was trying to get ready stuff to come and cook here in the um for for for christmas lunch because my parents-in-law were coming to stay and i i got here christmas day and i was absolutely exhausted none of the technology was working i i could have cried there was one person who was sat in this congregation who looked at me all the way through and smiled and nodded and encouraged me and i have no idea if anything that i said that day blessed them or blessed anybody else i know that i was blessed by that person for us to be influential in this body we don't have to say a word god can use a smile or a nod none of this is just meant to be for our benefit um i sometimes like reading bits of the bible backwards and i'm not going to do it for the sake of time now but i think it's really interesting if you read that a bit acts 2 47 back to 44 because it ends with and the lord added to their number daily those who were being saved you work that back and you see the steps that go before it how they love one another how they are looked on in favor in uh in the um in the uh place where they were in in jerusalem and i think it's a little bit like a domino effect are uh in in um in corinthians we are told that we are christ's ambassadors as though god is making his appeal through us so it's not just that we are influential with each other we are influential the people who look in and think about what this world uh what what what um what christ's church is like on this world and i started by so i was going to show you a video but i'm just going to show you this still instead um i started off by telling you that that that story from the the school in gorduston and um and about my friend who thought they couldn't come in and um there's this game that you can play online now which is called google feud and the idea is you have to try to guess like two words come up you have to guess what google auto complete will fill it in by and google auto complete is determined by the searches or things that other people have put in there's a really interesting video if you want to watch the whole thing it's about four minutes long it's incredibly challenging you can look at it uh on youtube and it starts with why are christians so and it goes through and some of them are great the vast majority are not and when you get to a vast majority of them are why are christians so anti and and and it just goes on and on and on i don't

believe that jesus wanted us to be a people who are known for what we're against i think he wanted us to be known as a people uh for what we stand for it's not that we don't have opinions or standards jesus did i believe he led with love it says he came with filled with filled with what john said filled with grace and truth i wonder uh you know whether or not we are influential if we're ambassadors are we a good ambassador for god in our community and together as a body we need to be good ambassadors christ okay i'm invited i'm influential i believe the bible tells us we're also invaluable to god's work we're invaluable because god can't do it without us invaluable because he chooses to do it through us the descriptions of the early church i i i had to look i'm i'm not very good at english and i'm certainly not very good at knowing what words uh sort of what categories they fall into elijah often comes up to me and says daddy what's uh what's a pronoun and i struggle with those let alone this so i'm told that this word all here is called a determiner in english now because it speaks to the quality of what goes after it and the bit that we read in acts 2 and acts 4 also where it talks about the believers sharing all of their possessions together they are full of determiners all of the believers were together and had everything in common all the believers were one in heart and mind god was at work in them all it wasn't that there were some superstars and some who were just coming along for the ride and i don't want to steal you know emily's thunder but you know in a few weeks time she's going to be speaking about fellowship and maybe she'll use the famous bit from 1 corinthians 12 where um paul talks about our gathering together as being like being parts of the body variety difference unity not uniformity and i love that idea of the body um but as a biologist i have to say um in our bodies there are some things that are called anyone ever heard this phrase it's called a vestigial organ you know what it means what does it mean something doesn't have any purpose appendix yeah your spleen has a lot of purpose trust me if that comes out there's a whole lot of problems um in this body are no vestigial organs god wants all of us to play our heart i i love the way um one one church that i i know of in america they have like these sort of slogans up as you go in and and it says um we are spiritual contributors not consumers and that said to everybody as they walk in the church they have an important part to play and the same thing should be true in in us whenever we meet together i've always thought the word church service is a bit of a weird phrase service has two meanings doesn't it are we a church of served people or are we a church of serving people it's quite easy nowadays when you go um there there's uh there's a subway near where i work at london bridge and um i kind of like it because when you go in you can get your sandwich your way and i mean so much so that it takes you 10 minutes to describe exactly what you want you know i want this bread i want that selection of meat those vegetables i want it grilled with this sort of cheese and i wonder how easy it is us in a church to want to be served i want my type of worship i want someone to preach with the style

i want i want somewhere that i feel comfortable i believe that jesus is calling us to be a church that serves one another it's this horrible phrase i think people say i moved into a new area so i'm church shopping maybe we should be going to a church to see how we can be used there as opposed to finding a church where we think we will get our needs met and again it's not just about us here it's about looking out as well i love this picture which says you are here um arrow should be very subtly different for all of us because nobody else is in the situation that you are in no one else is in your family in your position in your workplace in your streak and it says in ephesians we are god's handiwork created in christ jesus do good works which god has prepared in advance that you do you are invaluable in his work and finally this really is the last bit um we should be invested maybe there should be a question mark we should be invested in god's church it says at the beginning of that bit in acts 2 they devoted themselves they were absolutely committed in acts 4 no one claimed their possessions were their own they didn't all sell everything but no one held it so tightly that they weren't prepared to let go they really were all in the bible makes it clear that if we are going to invest and we all invest in something we all have the same amount of time in the day and we choose how we invest it we choose how we invest our time we choose how we invest our talents we choose how we invest our money whatever it is great or small that god gives us jesus warned us that we should invest wisely and i love and i will leave you with um this thought so this is actually from fairly old but not the first english translation of the bible this is from the tyndale bible if we are going to invest in something then jesus said this uh um peter had just said that he believed that jesus was the messiah the savior god's son god's chosen one and jesus said upon this rock i will build my congregation my gathering of people and the gates of hell or death i.e. nothing will prevail against it so we should try to invest our lives in what god wants us to and i believe that's his church some strange reason this is the vehicle through which god has chosen to spread his good news his gospel at the beginning of acts when they gathered together it seems like there was only about a hundred maybe a hundred and twenty of them in a day there became three thousand and and the rest as they say is history the church is is god's plan a b and c we're we're it and the church is us because we are the people who are the church and god calls us to be in his church let's um can we actually just stop for a minute and close our eyes um i know it's late and i know we want to rush out and have coffee but um i i was really challenged as i as i put this stuff together and um and i think it would be good if we just paused and responded and acknowledged to god if there's something that he wants to change in in us and so i know this is very un-english um i'm going to ask us if if you want to if you want to respond then somehow show god that you do you could open your hands you could lift your you can lift your hands up somehow i i find it useful if i want to respond and say i'm in to show that i'm in so if you are thankful that you've been

invited in but acknowledge that you need his help to love those you find hard to love and if you acknowledge that god's given you gifts and influences and you want to use them for him wherever you are if you acknowledge you haven't always represented him the way that he would have you as his ambassador and if you want to as part of our community here go all in and just ask god just show i'm i'm going to raise my hands father i thank you that you say to us that the same power that raised jesus from the dead is at work in us and i pray as those early believers did that you will give us boldness boldness to love boldness let you use us boldness to live as your witnesses in herne hill in london and to the rest of the world amen let's close with our final hymn thank you so so so so so so