

How the Church is Governed

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 November 2011

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, Acts chapter 2, page 1097 in the ESV Bible, Acts chapter 2, and we're going to take up the reading at verse 42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, and awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Well, now, by now you will have received the letter that went out from myself on behalf of the session with the decision that was taken, at least one of the decisions that we are going to be, God willing, electing new office bearers over the next few weeks, both elders and deacons. And of course, that whole process gives the opportunity to ask some important questions of ourselves and our relationship with the church. It gives us the opportunity to stop and to ask ourselves, what is the church?

What is it to me? What is it supposed to be? What is it supposed to be in relation or in comparison with what it is? Does it live up to what it is supposed to be? I think for many, whenever they begin to talk about the church or think about the church, the first response within them is a feeling response. Either positive or negative, either yes or no. When you think of church, what's the first thing you feel? Is it a yes feeling or is it a no feeling? And my fear is that for many people, it is the latter rather than the former. But that can be for a variety of reasons. My problem is that it's already well me saying to you, well, it could be your fault. It could be the problem could lie with you.

[2 : 45] But the problem could also lie with us. But then I'm beginning to think in terms of you and us. That's not right, is it? There is no you and us when it comes to the church.

We are the church. And when we begin commenting on the church, either critically or questioning various aspects of the life of the church, we have to always remember that the answer doesn't lie just with me. It lies with all of us. Many of the issues that are raised when we begin to think of this issue, the answer actually lies with all of us. And if the church is going to do what it is supposed to do, what the Lord tells us to do, and if it's going to function as the family and community of believers that it ought to be functioning as, then it's got to involve all of us as a body of people.

Now that, again, perhaps I might be using that as an excuse, but it's a starting point. It's true. The church involves all of us. We are all part of it. And then, of course, there's all of the questions that arise within that question. When is a church not a church? How do you know that a church is a real church? Why do we do the things that we do? We are a particular type of church. We are a Presbyterian church. Why is it that we believe in Presbyterian church? What is it? What does it mean?

It simply means that we are governed by elders. That's all it means. I'll explain that in a few moments time. Why do we do the things that we do, and why do we not do what other churches do? Anyone who has traveled, as I have from time to time in various parts of the world, we know that Christians, they worship in different ways. There's a whole variety of ways in which various Christians and various different cultures worship. Why is it that we have the form that we do? And that can itself be a good thing, or it can be a bad thing. It can be good to ask that question, but if it comes from a kind of a, well, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, then that's not necessarily a helpful thing at all. Our questions ought always to be positive questions, biblical questions, arising out of what the church means to the Lord Jesus Christ. And of course, the questions that we ask have to be rooted, the answers to these questions must be rooted in the

Bible itself. And that's why I read that first passage of Scripture in Matthew chapter 16, where Jesus says, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And that, to me, is one of the most foundational statements of the church, the most foundational statements of the work, because it's rooted in the life and in the death and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If I was to ask you this evening, what did Jesus come to do? You might very well answer me. He came into the world to save sinners. The Bible itself says that. Christ came into the world to save sinners. And we believe that.

[6 : 37] That's a perfectly correct answer. There is no other way of being right with God and being forgiven. There's no other way of being given the eternal life that God offers to us other than faith in Jesus Christ. He came into the world to save sinners. But he also came into the world to build his church.

Now, the two are the same, because the church contains those saved sinners for whom Christ came to redeem and to set free. But it's another way of expressing the gospel. But perhaps we don't, we automatically think in terms of our individual salvation rather than our collective salvation. And I think we need to often go back to the words of Scripture to remind ourselves afresh of what the church means to Jesus Christ. Tonight, the church is his invention. It is his idea. The church is his creation. And it means everything to Jesus, so much so that he calls us his body.

Remember what he said to the disciples in John chapter 15. I am the true vine. You are the branches. The relationship between his people and him is as intimate as that. We are joined to Jesus by a living connection. Somebody said once that Jesus does not think of himself as a detached from his own people.

And there's an element of truth. I think that's true. We are so identified with Jesus that he calls us his branches and he is the vine. And of course, you remember that the Apostle Paul said in Corinthians that we are the body of Christ. And every one of us are like members of that body. And just like the the hand cannot say to the foot, because I am not a foot, I am no longer part of the body. You can't say that. And you can't say, and the eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you anymore. You can't do that either because every part of the body is a vital function to keep the body healthy and functional.

[9 : 06] And that means not just ministers. It means not just elders and deacons. It means the people of God all have to work together to play each part according to the ability and the skill that God has given each one of them. I believe that we in our Presbyterian, Scottish Presbyterian, perhaps Free Church, perhaps even Highland, I don't know, we have erred in terms of focusing all our focus on the minister and the elders and not enough on the people of God. Well, the Bible says otherwise. The Bible tells us that every single one of us is a member. And that's what a member is all about. I get puzzled when I hear people saying, I don't believe in membership. Well, I believe in membership because the Bible believes in membership. I don't mean whether your name is on the roll. I mean that you're a member of the body of Christ, an active, functional member, you doing your job, you're playing your part, and me playing mine. Each one of us has a job to do. The Lord has given us a function to play in the body of Christ. Somebody came to me some days ago and said, how about doing this?

How about putting out to the congregation a list of tasks that need to be doing and asking them, what are you good at? What would you like to be involved in? And I said to that person, go for it. Bring it to the, bring me a draft and we'll take it to the session and then we'll, because there is a real idea for the ways to find out the ways in which people can fit. A recent example of that was the setting up of a woman's visitation program. And I understand that that program is going well.

That involves members of the church, God's people, playing their part to take care of the needs of others who are perhaps housebound or perhaps whose circumstances have changed in some way. That's at least a little thing that we can do. But ideas like that are all part of the structure that is defined for us here in Acts chapter 2, which describes to us an active, lively, functional, zealous church that cared for one another as they worshipped God and as they witnessed to the gospel. Well, in Acts chapter 2, if we had read it from the very beginning, we would have read about how on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, after Jesus had risen again from the dead and after he had gone to be with the Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples while they were all together in one place in Jerusalem. And that was a truly wonderful occasion. It was a momentous occasion in the history of the world and in our history as well. You could call it the inauguration, if you like, of the New Testament church as the body of Christ. And they were filled

with the Spirit. They began to speak in tongues. And then they began to live as God's people together, not in the same house, but meeting together regularly and discovering the kind of work that God had for them to do in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And of course, we read some of those in Acts chapter 2. And in time, they were to discover how difficult it was to belong to the church. Their lives were on the line. They began to be hated because they belonged to this body. They were taken away. They were arrested. They were put to death.

[13:00] The disciples were all martyred apart from John and many others in the days and in the weeks and the years that were to come, particularly as the Jews complained to the Romans about the way in which Christians lived. The Romans were suspicious of them and they arrested them. They put them in jail and they put them to death by means of the gladiators and the lions and so on. They were to discover that the church was not all the joy that it started off as, but it was to involve tears and hardship and persecution as it does in many areas of the world today. I wonder how we would feel this evening about gathering, not in this great building tonight, in the freedom that we have, but gathering in fear, not knowing that someone was perhaps even going to burst in the door and shoot us or take us away to jail. We would never see our families again. How ready would we be to meet together as the people of God? Well, that's what these people experienced way back at the very beginning, the hardship and the danger and the sacrifice that was involved in the church. But it seemed that the more hardship there was, the more the people of God spread. And as we read there in Acts chapter 2, God added to their number those who were being saved. And I find it interesting that whilst I believe in evangelistic programs, I'm quite happy to believe in that. It's interesting that in Acts chapter 2, it's as the church lived as Christ wanted them to live and interact with one another and as they worshiped, that God added to their number those who were being saved. I'm not saying we do nothing to evangelize. I believe in evangelism as much as you do. But it's interesting, I find it, that way back at the very beginning, there seemed to be something natural. There seemed to be something spiritually compelling about these people. There's a verse in Acts that says that they took note that the men had been with Jesus.

There's something about the Christian life that is compelling. It can work both ways. You get people hating you because you're a Christian. And I believe the more I look around me in this modern Scotland, the more hatred of Christians I see.

I'm not trying to be dramatic. I really believe what I'm saying, that the tide is turning against the Christian church. I can't say from other parts of the UK, but in secular modern Scotland, there is a vitriol.

I sometimes read online when there's an article in the Scotsman or the Glasgow Herald or whatever, I read it online. And if you read it online, you get comments. People are able to type in comments.

And it's very, very interesting. The venom, the hatred that there is from individuals. Oh, well, you could say, well, these are extremists. Well, there's a lot of them. A lot of extremists.

[16:17] Or could it be that the tide is no longer sympathetic with the gospel at all? Well, that's the kind of day we live in. God has raised us for this day, just like he raised his people for to be persecuted in acts. And just like he wants us, he doesn't want to live in the past. We can't turn back the hands of time. There's no point in wishing we were 50 years ago or 100 years ago. That's not going to do any good. We have to live for now. And we have to witness for now.

We have to believe that the gospel is as much the power of God to salvation today as it ever was. And we have to believe in that power, that somehow God is able to compel people and to draw them and to make them know that they are sinners and that they need him and that they need Jesus Christ.

We've got to believe that. And even if it doesn't happen by tens and hundreds and thousands, God is still working. We have to believe that. The worst thing that we can do is to retreat into the background, to close the doors, to pull the shutters down and just wait until the end. No, that's not what the Lord wants us to do. He's told us to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. He's told us to function as a church. God loves his church and that's what matters.

And I hope that you love your church as well because it's his church. I really hope you do. And if there are those no feelings, those negative feelings, ask yourself why.

And ask yourself what you can do to resolve them. And if it's something I could do to resolve it, then tell me. Tell me what it is. Tell us how we can function in this town to make Christ known more effectively, to function more effectively, to be the people of God and what God wants us to be.

[18 : 05] Nobody's going to argue with that. I'm certainly not. The elders are not. The members are not. Nobody's going to argue with that because that's what we're here for. We're here to make Jesus known. And when you consider the people that are in this town with all its history of revival and gospel ministry in this town, there are thousands of people who are as far away from the gospel this evening as they ever were. And they are dying this evening and going to a lost eternity. We must always remember what we have is what they need. The only thing that they need. So how do we reach people in this town? How do we reach people where God has placed us? So then the question is, what is the church? And we're wrestling with that question. And it is a question. And when it comes down to the kind of church that we are. And I explained before that when we talk about a Presbyterian church, and this is, of course, where we're coming back to the original question. How is the church to be ruled? That's the question that relates to the letter I put out this morning and this evening to the election of office bearers. How is the church to be ruled?

Well, you'll notice that as you read through the book of Acts, there were all these Christian people. And they were, first of all, together in one place in Jerusalem. And then they scattered. They went back to their homes. And then they had to figure out how to meet together.

The question is this. Did God just leave all these new converts, all these new fledgling churches, to just make up their own rules? To just do what they felt like doing? Was it a free for all?

Was it just a, was it a democratic rule? How did they live? How did they function? When did they meet? How did they evangelize? What kind of activities did they do? Who decided all of these things? How was any order? Was it all spontaneous? Or was there some kind of order within this new great movement that was to become no less than the most influential, most powerful movement in all the world? And it still is. We talk about the threat of Islam, but sometimes we forget that in 2,000 years, the gospel in God's people has been and continues to be the single most, the greatest influential force that there is in this world. Remember that.

It is a guaranteed success. Jesus said, the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Whatever else comes and goes, whatever empires and powers and religions, they can come and they can go, God will never fail. We are part of a movement that is guaranteed to succeed. Even if we die in the process, it will do what God planned that it would do.

[21 : 29] And yet we have responsibilities. We have been put in a particular place here in Stornoway in a particular congregation. God's providence means that, for example, I was born in my church and I take the view that until you have a good reason to leave it, if there's a good reason, and I mean a very, very good reason. I've never found a good reason to leave my church. I love my church. I love the people in it. I don't always get on with them. I differ in so many different ways. I disagree with some of them. I love my church. I really do. Some things drive me, they drive me up the wall. I get frustrated.

I get tired. But I love my church. Because my church is my brothers and my sisters in the Lord. That's what they are. It's not just my history, the history. It's not just a particular culture or tradition. That simply happens to be the place, the time and the place in this world in which God has placed me, in his providence. And I want to work within that. I don't want to fight against it. I want to work within it in order for the gospel to be made known and for the sake of the people among which God has placed me. Now back to the question, did the church, was it a free for all in terms of government? No, it wasn't a free for all. As you read through the book of Acts, which is the history of the early church, you discover that there is order and there is structure and there is rule in the church. And that rule was exercised, it was exercised through people who were appointed to be rulers. Now, whenever we talk about rule in the church, we have to stop and we have to recognize that rule in the church is completely different from rule in any other organization. I remember when I was in industry and if you were a boss, then what you said went.

That was it. You came in and you told somebody to do something and they went and did it. You had a meeting, you say, you do this, you do that, you do the next thing, that was it. You were the boss. Doesn't happen that way in the church. In fact, it's the very opposite.

When we talk about rule in the church, God tells us that the rulers are the servants.

And I know that because the head of the church is the servant. That's the picture that we have in John chapter 13, where God himself, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, through whom the universe was created and who at his disposal has infinite power and glory and eternity without beginning and without end. Here is God and he's in this room with 12 other men and he gets off his seat, he takes a towel and a basin and he goes round every one of them and washes

their feet. Isn't that the most extraordinary scene that you've ever come across?

[24 : 56] It's the paradox of the incarnation, the paradox of God coming into, condescending into this world and becoming a man and humbling himself. He made himself nothing. That's what Paul says, he made himself of no reputation or he made himself of nothing. The original says that he emptied himself.

God himself. That's enough for us to think about for a whole evening, isn't it? God himself. That's enough for us to think about for a whole evening. God himself. That's enough for us to think about for a whole evening. But he also did it, not just to illustrate what he had come to do, but he also did it as an example.

If then, verse 13, if then, your Lord and teacher, if I as your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. So when we come to talk about rule in the church, it's not an autocratic rule.

It's a servant rule. And if you haven't learned to be a servant, you haven't learned anything about authority within the church. You see, ultimately, God, Christ is the head of the church. There already is a head. It belongs. We belong to Jesus. We are his. We are his creation. That's what Paul tells us in Ephesians. You are God's workmanship. And can you picture just now someone who is a sculptor, and he spends hours and hours and hours with his tools chipping away at the wood or the stone, and he's creating this work of art, this beautiful work of art, and he loves his own work. He takes such satisfaction and such joy in what he is creating. That's what God is doing. That's what Paul says. You are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus. That's what God thinks of his people.

And so when we come to talk about rule within the church, it's a very, very humbling thought. We are all accountable to God for what we are and what we do. And if ever, if ever, there was a function in which I ought to be very careful, it is when God tells me that I have oversight over his people and that their souls are my responsibility. God will call me into account for that.

[27 : 34] And so if there's any pride, it has to go anything at all. So rule in the church means that there is already a rule that was already ahead of the church, Jesus, and it means that it's ruled by the servants of the church. But it's also established already. We don't make up our own rules.

I don't know if you've ever wondered what happens at session meetings or what happens at deacons' courts. And sometimes it can be made to appear very mysterious, particularly when a session meeting is secret, and it's supposed to be secret. And I completely agree that it should be secret. And I'll tell you why it should be secret. Because sometimes we are trying to sort out some very, very, very sensitive problems. You have to do that in private. Not because we have anything to hide, but because our particular responsibility, it involves a particular solemnity that is exclusive to the elders.

And the last thing that anybody needs is to be afraid of what he says going out into the street the next day. But sometimes a session meeting can appear to be very mysterious. I don't think there's much mystery in a session at all. Because every single decision that we have to take, we first and foremost have to ask, what is in the best interests of the people of God in this congregation? And how does the Bible direct us? And how, if the Bible doesn't give a specific direction, how can we, by the best, humblest, most prayerful common sense, how can we make this work for the good of the congregation?

There's no mystery in it. It is simply trying to reach the best possible decision. Sometimes we can get it wrong. Sometimes we disagree. Sometimes what one person thinks is not what another person thinks.

And yet we're able to come to a collective decision because I hope that we believe in what we are doing. So rule is established already. Jesus is the head of the church, and we are here to implement what the Bible says. We already have the rule of faith and life, which is the Bible itself. We don't make up our own rules. We do things, I hope, by the Bible. I'm not there to say what I want to do.

[30 : 24] And to be an autocrat, nobody else is as well. And by the way, and again, I'm sort of bringing in some of the more practical things into this discussion as well. I have no more power than any of these gentlemen here. Some people think that the minister has, he's the kind of managing director and everyone else is a kind of middle manager. That's not the way it works at all.

When it comes to the decision making of the session, in actual fact, I don't even get a vote. Unless, of course, there's an equal tie on both sides. So the minister is not there to sit in the chair and to point the finger and say, this is what we're going to do. That's not what happens at all.

And there's a very important reason why that is not what happens. I'll tell you why. Because going back to the Acts of the Apostles, every congregation was ruled by elders. Not one elder. No, there wasn't a hierarchy. There wasn't a ladder of authority. There wasn't a junior elder and a senior elder. There was elders. Now, I'll prove that to you. Acts 14.23. You can read it when you go home. Acts 14.23. When they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. Titus, Paul says to Titus 1 verse 5, this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. So what the Bible tells us is that every time a congregation was set up in Asia or in Macedonia or in Rome or wherever it was, the first thing they did was they appointed elders. It wasn't just one elder. Why was it not just one? Have you ever wondered why it is that no congregation has just one elder? We're not allowed to have just one elder. Why? Because then he gets to be the boss. And that's not right. We don't believe in one man being the boss. It's not one man ministry and it's not one man rule. There have to be a collection. There has to be a collection so that there's a consensus. And what we say in our Presbyterian structure, because of common sense, we say every session meeting has to have three men. Why do you think that is? Because can you imagine if there was two and they both disagreed? How would they resolve it? Who would actually, what would the decision be? So that's why you have three. Because at the end of the day, sometimes you have to take a vote. And if you have three, then there's always a majority when you have to take the vote. Common sense.

And I hope that it's always done prayerfully and humbly. And I hope that when you're on the losing, the losing side, shouldn't be the losing side anyway. And when your opinion doesn't carry, that you are humble enough to accept the will of the majority and to fall in with that majority.

That's the way we operate. Can anybody argue against that? It's common sense. Grounded on the Bible. Grounded on the Word of God. That is what Presbyterianism is. There's no hierarchy. Ah, you say, what about, is there not a word in the New Testament called a bishop? Surely he's higher than an elder.

[33 : 45] No. That's a myth. Because if you study the New Testament, you actually find that there's three words that are used for rulers in the church. There's shepherd, there's bishop, and there's a presbytos, which is an elder. And you'll notice that these three words are used interchangeably, so that there's no hierarchy. All of them are on the same level. And we operate to that principle in our Presbyterian church. Our session contains elders. All of us are on exactly the same level.

No one's got a louder voice than the other guy. Everyone has an equal right to say and propose and to suggest and to discuss. And we discuss everything fully and carefully and prayerfully and listen to every voice, the voice of whoever wishes to make that point or whatever. And sometimes our meeting, for the sake of that, it can last two or three hours. Because through discussion, you know, strange, isn't it? How sometimes you go into a meeting with your mind made up.

You think you know what the right answer is. You know, I've seen this dozens of times. You go into a meeting and you think you know what the answer is. And as you discuss it, you know what? You realize you're wrong.

Because you listen to someone else. And all of a sudden you think, man, he's got the right answer. And he's much wiser than I am.

And here was me thinking that I had the right answer. That's the way that God has given. You know, it's the most humbling thing to be involved in the work of the church. The number of times you're wrong. There's an enormous number of times when you prove to be wrong.

[35 : 43] And that's part of the way in which God matures you as a Christian and as a brother in Christ. When he shows you that you're wrong through someone else, through someone who's wiser and more experienced than you are. That's the way in which God operates. It's absolutely marvelous.

But if you're going to take your pride in with you, forget it. It doesn't work that way. And that's when conflict starts. And that's when things get nasty.

It's not because there's disagreement. There's very often disagreement. It's the way in which we conduct our disagreement. But Presbyterian church, again, rooted in Acts chapter 2, it also means, it also takes in the view of the wider church.

Because we don't forget that we are not just one congregation. We are part of a network of congregations that extend all across the country. Now, we don't live as if we are a lone ranger. We don't care about them. We don't care about that. No, we don't. We live. There's a two-way thing. First of all, our responsibility, particularly as a big congregation here, is to support the needs of those who are weaker.

[36 : 58] You take someone who's trying to plant a church somewhere, and they need money. They don't have many people. They maybe want to put a minister or an evangelist in there, and that person's job is to make Jesus known where he hasn't been known before.

He needs a starting point. And a congregation like this, we can support that kind of work, where the gospel is weak. That's what Presbyterianism is all about.

It would be entirely selfish of us as a big congregation. It's okay for us. We've got the means. We've got the money. We've got the people. We could easily say, forget. Who cares about the rest of the church?

We're going to spend our money on just what we're doing here. That's not right, is it? What about abroad? What about the churches which are operating in India and in South Africa?

What about the Dumasani College in South Africa, where they're training men to be ministers in churches and to plant churches and to preach the gospel? Are we going to say to them, who cares about them?

[38 : 03] That's what you call an independent spirit. I'm not saying that all independent churches are selfish. They're not. Some of them are the most active churches that you can find.

But what we say, what we do in Presbyterianism, is we tie ourselves. We're the one body with these people. We're the same body. And we extend to various parts of the world so that we can support. But we also depend, as well as extend, we also depend on the wider church. There are questions that sometimes arise.

And this goes all the way back to Acts chapter 15, where a question arose about circumcision. And it caused all kinds of friction and dissent and problems in the church.

And it threatened to destroy the early church in Acts chapter 15. Some people said one thing. Other people said another thing. There was a disagreement within the church.

[39 : 04] What did they do about it? You know what they did? They gathered everyone together, all the elders together. They traveled from all different parts. And they gathered in Acts chapter 15 in Jerusalem.

And they debated, and they argued, and they discussed, and they finally reached an agreement. And that agreement was binding on the whole church.

That's why I believe in Presbyterianism this evening. Because it's biblical and because it works. Of course it works. Anything that's biblical works. Because it's common sense. Because it arises out of what Christ has done at the very beginning. So I thought this evening that we would simply spend a few moments just thinking about these issues.

There are so many more issues. So many more questions that arise. Bring them to me. Email them to me. Text me them. And we can discuss them as this process goes. Because this process of election, it raises all kinds of questions and issues.

[40 : 10] I hope I've been able to comment on some of them. But I hope that we have a fresh view of what the church means to each one of us because of what it means to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our function here is to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. And I hope that as we progress and as we are going to be returning to this theme from time to time over the next few weeks, we're going to be looking at the qualifications that ought to be in those who you may want to choose as elders and as deacons.

We're going to be looking at what the Bible tells us and how the Bible instructs us and guides us as to how we choose those who the Lord would have us choose.

I want this church, and you do too, to be a vibrant, Christ-centered, gospel ministry in Stornoway. I want this church to be a close, warm, secure fellowship for its people, young and old.

[41 : 33] I want everyone to feel that this is their home. You know the one thing that I hate hearing? When I hear from time to time, I don't feel welcome here.

That really, really bothers me. Because that's the opposite of what the church should be. I want everyone to feel welcome here.

I want the worst sinner in Stornoway to be able to walk in that door and not feel that he's a fish out of water. I want to see people coming in through these doors.

I want you to be able to invite them. That's your function. That's your job. That's our great privilege. To be able to invite people in here.

I want people to come as they are, not to feel that they have to sanitize themselves in order to come through that door, because Christ accepts us as we are. We cannot do a thing to wash ourselves or cleanse ourselves or change ourselves. Only God, we believe in the gospel as being the power of God to salvation. I think we've got plenty of work to do, haven't we?

[43 : 04] To make sure that we're asking God right now to show us the place that we need to have in His kingdom.

And I want to say, first of all, sorry for all the young people for taking so long tonight. I wanted to say this earlier on. I am so, so happy when I see children in church. Can I say that to you? I've said it before. Maybe some of the things, I haven't told any stories tonight. I haven't said it's all been a bit boring for the young ones tonight, because we're talking about stuff that you probably don't understand much. And please don't stop coming to church.

Please keep coming to church, because you're going to hear in church the best, best possible message. And hopefully I won't take as long as this in future. Let's pray.

Amen. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks for all that we have been able to think about this evening, and we pray that whatever questions that arise in our minds, that we will always keep in mind what the church is, who the church is, and our place, our belonging. Our Father in heaven, we pray that where there needs to be change, that there will be change. We pray, Lord, that you will, that you will change, that you, that you will give us to examine ourselves and what we are and who we are in the light of your word. And we pray that you will mold us and shape us and fashion us to being what you want us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.