

Series: 6:8@Six:Eight	Reference: Various Passages	Title: Community	Date: 10.28.18
Website Writeup:			
We address today our first church value which is Community Matters. Where all of us are valuable in the local church, the local expression of Christ's body & his kingdom reign marked by justice, mercy & humility. We explore here what it means to be a part of the local church body.			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Today we begin by reading our first church value: **Community Matters**

Every person's infinitely valuable to God; we value people & what each person brings to the table. We welcome the curious, disillusioned & the skeptic. Faith's an adventure to be lived; we're here to help each other on that journey. We intentionally seek to serve one another & the surrounding community in the practical love & message of Jesus. Our decisions together are based on faith, risk & love. We're a prayerful community, led by the Holy Spirit & Scriptures. We're externally focused, engaging the surrounding community mainly through their established avenues of service. Our commitment to community drives us to plant new families of faith as far as we can reach.

In the beginning episodes of *LOST* survivors organized, gravitated to leadership positions & established roles for the groups survival to sustain life & health in a crisis. Every person vital & important, forming an undocumented institution dedicated to survival & rescue, with clear roles, leadership & structure for the sake of people. There were things some wanted to do, which may've been good, but couldn't, they didn't benefit the whole. They did well for a while. Later though, institutional power became more important than the people for which it existed. Personal desires trumped community. They splintered into small factions due to the selfish desires of a few.

Enron an institution/corporation, good in it's purpose to bring heat to homes & businesses, among other things; 20,000 people employed. In the end the institution was abused for the selfish end of certain individuals. An institution which could have, and did, do a lot of good, became destructive by the pride of a few. It fell taking down the *Arthur Andersen* accounting firm with it, one of the top seven in the country.

The local church can lose its purpose & be misused in the hands of people for personal gain or pride. But it isn't the institutions fault, it's the loss of the moral compass of a few corrupting the institutional whole.¹

In this series, 6:8@Six:Eight, we come to our first value today, Community; the Local Church. Setting ourselves against the backdrop of Micah 6:8, our signature verse, where the Israelites were thinking in individualistic terms, not as a communal whole - they'd become corrupt due to individual desires. The system God put in place wasn't at fault,

¹ Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner

people were. As a result, God calls them to do justice, love mercy & walk humbly - communal/institutional initiatives, back to the goodness of the institutional structure to which God had called them. God calls them to think beyond the individual. A community under One Head, walking humbly, doing justice & loving mercy as the character of God is reflected through them to other nations. To live as community reflecting him; as a Godly institution, a church as we know it today.

Let me read you a story...

The church was old. Young urban professionals came only to buy the property, not to worship. The pastor declared a full-scale capital fund drive. Older church members opened their wallets for the new plans calling for a modern building, a wellness center, coffee bar & park. Campaign slogan: "Build it & they will come."

The wrecking ball swung. The staff poked around the rubble, reminiscing. Nothing remained but the original foundation. A pastor picked up a brick. Scrawled across it were ancient Hebrew letters. Another stone had Greek lettering. Each foundation stone bore the name of a prophet, or apostle.

Then they found the cornerstone which read 'Jesus'. The leaders sat together on cinderblocks discussing the passion which had drawn them to ministry. Construction engineers wandered by & joined in. There were tears & testimonies. They passed a Diet Coke & Moon Pie, as the pastor recited the words of the communion service. There among the debris, rose a new temple, an invisible one, that seemed to reach towards heaven, or maybe the other way around. For this is only the beginning of a story first told in Ephesians 2:19-22...²

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners & strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people & also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles & prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together & rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The Ephesians, once foreign to God & each other, were called into God's family. A family with a long history & tradition of being built up & formed by the teaching & direction of apostles & prophets, held together by Jesus, the Cornerstone of the Church. The first stone laid down for a building & the one by which all other stones are measured; determining the final strength & footprint of the building.

Cultures have historically made many different kinds of sacrifices buried under cornerstones to ensure the strength of a building. Some of these are blood sacrifices, even human. The image is, Christ, through sacrifice, became the stone in which the whole Church is joined together & rises to become this holy temple. A foundation built on the blood of Christ. A temple which speaks of community, rather than individuals - a temple by which God dwells in Spirit. The individual Christian is sealed with God's Holy

² Catalyst Groupzine, p119-120 with a few changes

Spirit, we're part of the Temple, the Church - a communal whole. God's witness is shown through the whole, rather than the individual.

We need desperately to shift our focus off the me & onto the we; off the I, onto the us. God fully resides in the *local church*, we as a whole are God's portable temple with clearly defined leadership, structure & direction. This morning isn't 'church', this is a worship service of the local church, Six:Eight. The local body of Christ, a defined local institution of God. Local Christ-followers organized for the purpose of His kingdom.

There's an anti-institutional sentiment out there now. I met with someone from another church who sought counsel, saying, "I'm fed up with the organized church!" Some say we need to get back to the purity of the gospel before the institutional church was formed. *But the early church was an institution; local institutions with clear leadership, structure & vision. Any sustainable, survivable movement must institutionalize. Institutions are vital to us as relational creatures. Institutions are good & God ordained. God designed society to function in community. When we, or God, want to get something done, we form an institution. Countries with the institution of law. Banks, as institutions to protect money. Schools, as institutions to guide kids. Adam & Eve placed in the institution of marriage. We're born into the institution of family.*

Institutions, run well, give emotional support, root us & give direction for the future. Without them things devolve merely to the present moment; no roots, no past, no thought of passing anything along to future generations. Anti-institutionalism is destructive socially, spiritually, emotionally & physically - they're established to pass on values, customs, practices & faith.³ If anarchy were even possible, it'd be damaging.

Like *LOST*, or *Enron*, it's not the institution which fails - it's the people within it losing sight of institutional purpose. We corrupt the local church when we misuse it for selfish gain, rather than for that with which it was established.

Some might say the early church wasn't institutionalized. But, in Acts, when Paul arrives in Rome, there's a clear institution already established. Local churches had leadership, organization & sacraments. Jesus built that, set the ball in motion, knowing where it led. He's not shaking his head saying, "Oh you guys screwed it up, I meant for you to be a bunch of unorganized hippies!" He began this, ¹⁸*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18)*. Institutional statements. Building a church means building an institution.

Some may not have a problem with church as institution, but may say, "I belong to the Universal Church, not a local church." Not seeing the validity of rooting themselves into a particular local church, submitting to its direction, since they're mystically connected to the greater Body of Christ. We're called in a historical line of people & tradition, to be members of, not only the Universal Church, *but first & foremost the local church*. What that person's really saying is, "I don't want the authority of the local church over me."

³ Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner

The NT primary focus is on the local church & the full expression of church community is seen in each local body. The local church isn't an incomplete part of the whole, we don't have part of Jesus, until we're mystically united with the Universal Church. The Local Church has the whole of Jesus embodied in it; it's why Jesus says, ***20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them***" (Mt 18:20). He's embodied here. The local church is the expression of a future reality in a particular physical space & time. At this moment the local church is the only way we experience the future kingdom hope now. The Local Church is an institution with clearly defined direction, vision & mode of operation. Calvin said, "He who does not have the Church for his mother cannot have God for his father."⁴ Calvin saw the necessity for the local church in Christian life.

So, the local church for the Christian, isn't something we shop around for, to come, pick & choose, take what we want & go home, disconnected. Splitting ourselves between bodies, not submitting fully to one. Likewise, the local church isn't something we attend on Sundays & go do ministry by ourselves on the side disconnected from the local body because we're 'spiritually a part of the universal church'.

Sometimes people say, "We should celebrate what God's doing in individual lives." Sounds good & sometimes so. However, that often means Jane Smith's doing something she calls 'ministry' disconnected from the vision & direction of the Local Church. It may look good from the outside, but when explored there are problems. It's unsustainable & incomplete since it's the work of one person. And even though it may be valid in some time & place, it's something which derails the communal vision & ministry of the local body. Sometimes it's not a work of God, but of pride, it started because they feel 'the church' doesn't do it right & they can. A work of pride never lasts. Sometimes, it's simply a mask for sin. We had a man at my former church who masked his pedophilia with a 'ministry' to students (unsanctioned by the church). In the end, the church's name was drug through the mud, although they'd done all they could to address it over the years & naive parents allowing their kids to be involved, despite leaderships warnings, suffered.

Sometimes a work is good & should be folded in; that person needs to be willing to fold it under the churches lead, allowing the body to engage. Yet, in a prideful work, they'll hold onto it as their baby & won't allow the church to direct. In the end, that person leaves the church & begins to hop, since church leadership may entertain the person for a while, but pride always comes to light & is confronted.

The local church is something to which we devote ourselves & plug into, a local institution with a direction & purpose which we engage in. We join the church, not the other way around. It's essential to our spiritual walk with Christ, something we die for, because Jesus died for it. The local church is the avenue of glorifying Jesus & in which we come into the fullness of life in Him. Church hopping isn't spiritual maturity. Paul

⁴ Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner

mentions being 'in Christ' 164 times in his Epistles, a term largely in reference to the local church body.

To be 'in Christ' is synonymous with being 'in a local body of Christ'. Our physical presence in the gatherings of church is important. Hebrews 10:25 urges us to continue to meet together. When one gets in the habit of showing up only when it's convenient, it's detrimental to the whole, since it's not about the individual, but the body. The Body needs all its members present & active. We need to be here, not because these sermons are so great, we need to hear & experience where we're going as a body. To understand our role in community. From tithing, to engagement in church initiatives, is vital to us moving forward as the local body of Christ in this area. That can't happen with inactive body parts, or with split affinities. A hand can't be a part of two bodies - the imagery Paul uses to illustrate the body of Christ.

We perpetuate a dichotomy between spiritual & physical worlds when thinking we can have a spirituality without a link to our bodies in geographical proximity & commitment to others. Faith's linked, not only to a mystical union with Jesus in the Universal Church, but also to the physical reality of our bodies & others right around us in geographical community. Faith's grown, worked out & developed in relationship with other people around us. In no other way does it happen. We have to be here to know others & be known by them - to know & be known by Jesus. Only when we show up, engage & allow others to know us, encourage, challenge us & participate in the communal vision of the local body are we being church; to do so, is to be in 'in Christ'. We have to humbly show up, willing for local church leadership to direct us as ones charged with protecting, serving & setting the communal direction of the local body.⁵

The local church is always 4 things, which we see in Six:Eight:

1. ONE - a Local Church isn't disconnected from the Universal Church. We're one with the Universal Church in the present. What we do & teach affects them & them us.
2. HOLY - It's a community birthed & set apart by the Spirit. The presence of God must be there, it must be a community of the Spirit.
3. CATHOLIC/UNIVERSAL (not Roman Catholic/not Universalists) - we're tied to the past, tradition, creeds, prophets, apostles, etc. We don't make up our faith, we listen to the teaching & voices which have formed us, we stand in unity with the history of the Church on the non-negotiable issues all Christians have agreed upon through the centuries. This is why as members we sign a statement of faith (Ligonier Article).
4. APOSTOLIC ("To be sent") - God's missional, sending his local church out into community - being true to the past, relevant to the moment & a revelation for the future. Mission exists because worship doesn't among all nations. We don't focus on a building, but on Mission. Mission to the church is like hydrogen to water. The church is sent as a local body, not just as individuals.⁶

⁵ Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner

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We understand this in theory - we're living stones built up in Jesus with Him as our cornerstone. But it must be retaught, because language & attitudes tend to revert to, "I'm going to church," where we can occasionally show up & disconnect ourselves from community. We should say "I'm going to worship with my church." We're building blocks of the local church, a community measured off of Jesus, committed to building kingdom together. The first generation of Christians met in the Temple courts & homes, no church building, had leadership & direction & lived this well.

It says this about them...⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Ac 2:42). They followed leadership, practicing what they were taught in the middle of surrounding community. They ministered to each other in mind, heart, body & spirit - they devoted themselves to one another with communal vision & the end result was that they were... enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Ac 2:47). Paul, like us, identifies the local church as the body of Christ, with our spiritual gifts defining his hands, feet & voice in the local community.⁷ Church community works as a body, not individuals who come when they want, hear what they want & do as they want.

Community matters at Six:Eight. We value the local church as the body of Christ being his hands, feet & voice, using our gifting & love to bear witness to this local physical reality within which we find ourselves. Many people moved to the area when we planted Six:Eight combining their church home with their geographical home - physically close to each other & the surrounding community. United under one Head, reaching out through local community initiatives (our Temple courts), driving the same vision. As a part of this body, we're one with the universal church. We strive to be holy & filled with the Spirit of God, rooted in Christian tradition & Apostolic, going out to local community to be the hands, feet & voice of Jesus.

What you win them with, is what you win them to. Do we invite people into a corrupt institution marked with infighting, personal gain & pride? Putting on a show, individuals doing incomplete work? Or, do we win them to the living local body of Jesus? A faith & Spirit filled body operating out of grace, love, forgiveness & power? Driving in unity towards one vision realizing, if we try to focus on everything, we fail. If we focus on a few things well, we'll see our kingdom community expand.

⁷ Catalyst Groupzine, p122