

**Myers Park Presbyterian Church
Dr. Steven P. Eason
October 21, 2007**

***What Kind of Church Would Jesus Join?*
Matthew 16:18**

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¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

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Some of you were born and raised in this church and it has been your only church throughout your entire life. I've been a part of a lot of churches. I was baptized in an old country church in eastern North Carolina. I was raised in small churches that had covered dish dinners on the lawn with Miss Maggie's famous pecan pie, banana pudding – fried chicken and all that. We even had revivals. That's a different kind of church.

In seminary in the mid-seventies I was invited to preach to a black congregation in a Freewill Baptist church in Durham, North Carolina. They probably don't remember me being there but I've never forgotten them. Different kind of church.

My first church was 200 members with an average attendance of 93 on Sunday morning, and we had a grand total of 36 in Sunday School. The total budget in 1979 was \$20,736.64. They provided us a manse and a salary of \$10,900 a year with benefits. That's where I started. It was a different kind of church.

In Norfolk, Virginia we were a part of a large church that was rapidly growing. I was also a pastoral counselor on the staff of a counseling center. I sat with people who had been raped, abused by their father, left by their spouse, depressed to the point that they could not brush their teeth, dealing with their sexuality and struggling with low self esteem. That was a different kind of church.

We were in an 800 member church in Morganton, North Carolina for nine years. Small town – everybody knew everybody. We added 62 members every year and probably lost that many. But in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina we were a part of a church that grew from 1,400 to 3,000 over a five year period of time that was filled with young adults and children. The sanctuary was an old meeting house that had slave balconies and had been used as a hospital and a school during the Civil War. Different kind of church.

I've preached in a church in Debrecen, Hungary where I was translated to the congregation, many of whom were raised under a Communist government. I've preached to people in Malawi, Africa who walked for miles to get to church at 8:00 in the morning and sat reverently dressed in their best clothing with their Bibles open ready to worship God. I've preached in a church in Stirling, Scotland that once was Catholic and had been stripped and turned into a Protestant church during the Reformation. John Knox preached in that pulpit and King James was baptized there at the font. Different kind of church.

What kind of church did Jesus plan to build on this "rock?" *What kind of church would he want to join* today? As we come to Commitment Sunday, as every church does in some form or fashion, what are we committing to? What kind of church would Jesus want this one to be?

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If you pay attention to Jesus in the Gospels you can deduce about *what kind of church he would join*, what kind of church he would build. At the heart is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We're not just another non-profit organization doing good things in the world. We aren't the Rotary Club or the United Way. We're not the Arts Council or the American Red Cross. Nothing wrong with any of those but at the heart of the Church is a profession of faith that proclaims;

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

(Matthew 16:16)

That acknowledgement, that relationship, drives everything else a church does. I don't know how worship could be boring, dry or irrelevant if the church is proclaiming its faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, risen from the dead. I think if Jesus were church-shopping today he would be most comfortable in a church where worship seemed to be alive. Something rich and vibrant should be in the church's worship; more than emotionalism, much more than entertainment, the heart of the people being rendered to God in praise.

What Kind of Church Would Jesus Join? One that had true worship.

Or, can you imagine Jesus being a part of any church where there was not service and compassion for the needs of others? Can you imagine him being a part of a church that only sought to build itself up? Can you imagine him voting on a budget that did not take in the needs of the disenfranchised, the broken, the poor? Can you imagine him being happy with a church that did not have his heart for the world? Neither can I.

I don't think Jesus would be interested in joining a church that did not recognize the value of children. Nor would he be comfortable in a church that neglected the elderly.

Listening to Jesus in the Gospels I can only imagine that he would want to be a part of a church that was diverse with the principle of equality. There'd be a lot of joy in it even though there would be pain in it too. I think the kind of church Jesus would build would have forgiveness and reconciliation in it. It would proclaim hope and there would be truth preached from the pulpit and taught in the classrooms.

The church Jesus would build would have healing in it; healing of the body, of the mind, and of the soul. It would be a church that would transform your life and make you a different person because you are a part of that church.

Jesus would put certain core values into any church regardless of its size or how unique it may be. He wasn't looking to build a museum – he was looking to build a life-changing community of faith.

I came across this story about Clarence Jordan, who was instrumental in founding Habitat for Humanity. He visited an integrated church in the Deep South. He was surprised to find such a large church so thoroughly integrated not only black and white, but rich and poor. So he asked the old hillbilly preacher, *"How did you get the church this way?"*

The preacher said,

"Well, when our preacher left our small church, I went to the Deacons and said, 'I'll be the preacher.' And the first Sunday, I opened the book and read, 'As many of you as has been baptized into Jesus has put on Jesus, and there is no longer any Jews or Greeks, slaves are free, males or females, because you is all one in Jesus.'

"Then I closed the book and said, 'If you one with Jesus, you one with all kinds of folks, and if you ain't, you ain't.'"

So Jordan asked what happened after that and the preacher said, *"Well, the Deacons took me into the back room and told me they didn't want to hear that kind of preaching any more."* Jordan asked, *"What'd you do?"* He said,

'I fired them Deacons. I preached that church down to four people. And not long after that it grew and grew and grew. And I found

out that revivals sometimes don't mean bringing people in, but getting people out who don't love Jesus.' (William H. Willimon, *Eating and Drinking Among the Lost*, Pulpit Resource, Vol. 35, No. 4, Year C, p. 24)

On Commitment Sunday we are called to be committed to the church that Jesus builds. We are called to be committed to the kind of church that Christ is building, the kind of church to which *Jesus would want to join*. We are called to recommit ourselves to Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives.

When you come down the aisle today, don't just bring a card – bring your heart. Make a commitment to serve Him and pray that He builds His church in this place.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: **Amen**