

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

How would you describe 'home'?

When we say we are going home, we are often referring to a place or a location. But when we use that word, it is usually much deeper than just a place. Home is a place we feel comfortable, a place with fond memories, a place filled with loved ones and a community we feel we can belong to. Pico Iyer in his TED talk, 'Where is Home?', describes it this way. "Home has really less to do with a piece of soil than with a piece of soul. If somebody asks me where is home, I think of my sweetheart, or my closest friends, or the songs that travel with me wherever I happen to be." He goes on to say that "home is not just the place you were born, it is the place where you become yourself."

God has a lot to say about our spiritual home, and He calls it the church. Church has many different aspects to it and is understood differently by different people. It is often viewed as a meeting place, a community of people that love God, a time in which people worship God, an identity that people claim or take upon themselves, a type of spiritual family, and even a way of differentiating one person from another.

The word used in the New Testament for church is the Greek word *ekklesia*. It translates as assembly or congregation. This means it doesn't primarily refer to a building or location, but rather, to a group of people. These people in the New Testament had a few key elements that made them what they were.

Read [Acts 2:42-47](#).

What does this text tell us about what makes the church?

Just prior to this, the very first church begins. Jesus' time on earth wraps up and he heads back to heaven, leaving an instruction to pray for the Holy Spirit to come. At the start of Acts 2 the church is praying, and this marks the first key element of church: a community that seeks God together. As they pray, the Holy Spirit comes and rests powerfully on each of them, which is the second identifying factor: a community in which the presence of God is evident. They then immediately get onto the core business of the church, which is its mission. The believers share the gospel of Jesus and see thousands more join them that day. Therefore, we could identify church as a community of people who seek God together, in which the presence of God is evident, and that carry on the mission of Jesus.

Acts 2:42-47 tells us what this community looks like in their day to day living. They were grounded in the teaching of the gospel of Jesus. They spent time doing life together and building community by sharing meals with one another. They were generous with their possessions, and looked for ways to bless others out of their abundance. They were public about their faith and, in simply being the church in their communities, they saw people coming to know Jesus through them on a daily basis. This text highlights the major principles of what being the church means and looks like.

What from this text could be applied to us today and how might church look and feel if we lived it this way?

I think one of the major lessons for us to learn from the way the church began is that following Jesus was never meant to be a solo exercise. Nowhere in the Bible do we see people successfully going it alone in their faith. Everywhere that the gospel was preached and spread, *ekklesia* (communities of believers) were started. These communities grew and multiplied and divided and diversified and formalised and institutionalised and organised into what we call the religion of Christianity today. It has many facets and groups, but at its core, the church is

still centred on the spreading of the gospel of Jesus.

There is a culture in the world at the moment that seems to think we can individualise belief and religion. Many people will say that they are spiritual but not religious. They believe in God and Jesus but see no need to be attached to a church. This usually comes from either a past negative experience in church, or a perception that Christians are exclusive and judgmental. The truth is that the church is not perfect. It will let you down. Life gets messy, and the church is not immune to that mess. But the bigger truth is that you can't go it alone. The church at its best is the most incredible community in the world. You will find support for the journey of life, help in knowing how to follow Jesus, people to do the mission of God with, people to tackle life's biggest questions with, and hopefully; you will find a home.

A story in the book of John really helps to highlight what this community is like at its best. It's a story that at first glance may not seem to be about church at all, but as we dig a little beneath the surface it really comes to life. Lazarus, a friend of Jesus gets sick and dies. Jesus turns up and we read his encounter with the grieving community.

[Read John 11:17-44.](#)

[What in this story tells us about how the church should be?](#)

This is an incredible story. Jesus actually raises someone from death to life! That in and of itself is a lesson for the church today. Now I'm not saying that we will walk into morgues and bring everyone in there back from the dead (although with the power of God that isn't impossible), but I am saying that the church has been gifted with the victorious resurrection power of Christ through His Spirit. This means that we are called to spiritually bring people from death to life. In the same way that we have found Jesus and been brought into life with Him with the promise of eternity, we are also called to breathe that into the lives of others. Beyond just that though is something that is absolutely key, which helps us to understand why we can't just go the journey alone. We get to verse 44, Lazarus has been resurrected, and it says "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them...

"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

He needed the community around him to take off the grave clothes. It is entirely possible, to receive the resurrection power of Christ and to have the assurance of eternity with Him but still be restricted by the effects of death. This basically means that we can have salvation from Jesus but still live our lives today like that isn't true and fail to actually step into the freedom He has for us. That is where the church community comes in. It is our job to help each other take the grave clothes off, or in other words, to help each other truly live in the freedom that is ours in Jesus. Lazarus couldn't do that alone, he needed help. And we do too. There will be days that we believe lies about ourselves that just aren't true, days that the knocks of life will just feel like too much to handle, days that we slip into old habits and addictions. It is on these days we need the community of church to wrap their arms around us, to be there for us, and to take the grave clothes off, reminding us yet again that we are free and victorious in Jesus, today and forever!