

Marks of the Church

Sermons by Dr. Russell F. Metcalfe, Jr.

*Permission to reprint or publish Dr. Metcalfe's material is **granted**
provided that the reprinting or republishing is not-for-profit.*

Table of Contents

The Marks of the Church Introduction	5
Wesleyans are not fundamentalists.	6
Wesley's Authority Checks	7
THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH	7
THE CHURCH IS HOLY	9
THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC	9
THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC	10
The Church is One	11
THE IDEA OF CORPORATE FAITH	11
THE CHURCH IS ONE	13
BRINGING THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH HOME WHERE WE ARE	15
The Church is Catholic	17
THE CHURCH ISSUES IN THE UNFATHOMABLE GLORY OF GOD	17
THE ENTIRE CHURCH IS CALLED TO SPIRITUAL WORSHIP	19
THE PRESENCE OF JESUS IS A UNIVERSAL	20
THE BIBLE IS A UNIVERSAL	20
PREACHING IS A UNIVERSAL	20
SACRAMENTS ARE A UNIVERSAL	21
SOME FORM OF DISCIPLINE IS A UNIVERSAL	22
CALLED TO BE OURSELVES; CALLED TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH	22
The Church is Apostolic	23
THE APOSTOLIC POSITION	23

THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE	25
THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION	27
The Church is Holy	29
THERE IS A PERSONAL CALL TO HOLINESS	30
TO BE HOLY INVOLVES BEING PART OF GOD'S HOLY CHURCH	30
GOD'S CALL "BE HOLY!" IS ALWAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH	31
THE HOLY CHURCH WILL MANIFEST GOD'S LIFE IN THIS WORLD	32
SO, HOW IS THE CHURCH 'HOLY?'	33

The Marks of the Church Introduction

The Marks of the Church Series 1 of 5

Five sermons introducing the universally held theological truth that the church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with application for a church at the end of the twentieth century.

- **The Marks of the Church Introduction**
- The Church is One
- The Church is Catholic
- The Church is Apostolic
- The Church is Holy

April 7, 1991

INTRODUCTION

Christian is a church word. A Christian is a person who wants to follow Jesus. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) A Christian is a person who has LIFE in God (II Corinthians 5:17. "If any (one) is in Christ (they) are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."

A Christian is also a member of Christ's Body, the Church. (Acts 2:47) " And the Lord added to their number daily such as were being saved." Every Christian in the New Testament after Pentecost was a baptized member of the Body of Christ.

The relationship between the individual Christian and the Church of Jesus Christ is basic and vital. To best understand this relationship it is essential to ask "Just what IS the Church?"

How? Since total objectivity is impossible, I would state where I am coming from in this look at the church. I believe in a Christo-centric study of scripture; that is, reading to find out how to draw closer to Jesus; how to be more like Him; how to get to know Jesus better. My desire to know more about the church is a quest from faith to faith: I believe that we here (in Wollaston) are even now a true church, and part of

the one true church of Jesus Christ. This coincides with a growing conviction that ultimately the local church is the basic unit of the Church.

Without apology, our look at the church stems from an honest quest for growth: I believe that we are/are to be a part of a larger whole. This larger church is not limited to our denomination or even to our particular tradition (or that branch of Christendom with which we are most familiar and comfortable); our spiritual pedigree is Wesleyan/Anglican/Reformed/Arminian. But I want to see this church be all it can be!

Wesleyans Are Not Fundamentalists.

Given our Wesleyan viewpoint, still I want to be as honest as I can. And any study of the church fosters controversy over definitions. When we look for an authoritative word, on the church or about any other spiritual term, we probably feel pushed into an either-or battle between the liberals and the fundamentalists, based squarely on the nature of the scriptures. This struggle has monopolized the attention of many theologians and most of the pastor-theologians for more years than we would care to admit.

What neither liberals or fundamentalists would care to admit is that there seems to be a common thread in their approach to the scripture. Both wish to speak with an authoritative voice about what the scripture is or is not, what it says, what its purpose is. In short, both sides seek to have control of the holy writ.

When we talk about God and the holy things it is all too easy to fall into saying very profound and very stupid pronouncements.

Fundamentalists have a reputation for denying obvious scientific facts. Grudgingly and slowly the ultra-conservative religious positions have accepted some new ideas. The human side of the God-human connections have been down-played; i.e., the humanity of Jesus, and the human authorship of the books of the Bible. Sometimes this has been carried into a rejection or downplay of the human part of the God-human relationship we call salvation. God does everything, even to the selection of who shall-shall not be saved. Liberals have a reputation for denying or "scientifically

explaining away" the unseen or spiritual realities described in the Bible. The divine side of the God-human connections have been reduced to natural phenomena. Jesus was the highest expression of humanity, but that is all. The Bible is inspired exactly as other great literature is inspired. Prayer and religious exercise are subjectively true and useful if the individual so deems them.

Is there a way to break the hold of this controversy? Can we come to the Bible to seek and find God's mind about the church without either throwing away our living faith in God OR being so closed-minded that we know exactly where we should end up even before we begin?

Wesley's Authority Checks

In a Christo-centric approach to scripture, where shall we look for identification of who the church is, and what the church should be/become? As a Wesleyan, I suggest that we let John Wesley help us define what the church is.

Wesley had four sources of authority.

1. Above all the other authorities was the scripture as accepted in our Canon, the 66 books of the Bible.
2. Wesley also looked to what he called tradition; the accumulated wisdom of the centuries of people calling themselves Christian, including the Creeds and the writings of the early fathers.
3. Wesley also appealed to reason. He understood that the keenest reflections of the wisest persons thinking about God and holy things reason could not penetrate mystery; but he also understood that God's truth would not ultimately contradict itself. God is not capable of lying.
4. Finally Wesley believed that religious truth should be proved in the crucible of everyday living, by experience.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Lesson Ephesians 4:4 - 13

The Marks of the Church Introduction

Ephesians 4:13 ". . .until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The Orthodox Statements about the Church

To get a fresh look at the church we jump back over the years of liberal-fundamental debate, and look at what the church has said about itself, historically. I would give scriptural and prayerful consideration to these words which perhaps can help us have a better living relationship with the Church of Jesus Christ.

The "Reformation definition" of the church, ascribed to various Reformation figures (Luther, Calvin, even Wesley): The Church is where the Word is preached and the sacraments administered. The verbs are usually modified: faithfully preached, duly administered. Let us pray that here in our "basic unit of the Church" those two basic fundamental components will happen with faithful regularity.

The other definition of the church is one I would like to spend a great deal more time with; the simple statement contained in every orthodox church's beliefs: The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic. Theologians call these the "marks" or "notes" of the church. These essential parts of the church have deep and practical impact on the Christian and the local church.

Ephesians, Chapter Four, gives something of an overview of the universally accepted marks of the church. Later we will look at each mark separately. In this first, introductory sermon, just a brief word about each of the four:

THE CHURCH IS ONE The scripture fragment "until we all reach unity in the faith.." as well as " Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit- just as you are called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in (you) all." from our text chapter are not isolated proof texts, but rather reflect the great concern of the Lord of the Church that His church be united.

The Church of Jesus Christ is ONE CHURCH! This is both a statement of fact and a goal to which we will be striving until Jesus returns. We have to accept this statement by faith when we observe the fragmentation that is so obvious. There is a need for Christians to come together.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

Here the text challenges Christians to "attaining to the whole measure of the stature of Christ." The church is to be like its Lord.

How can we ever say that the church is HOLY? What does it mean "to be holy?" Is holiness an unattainable goal, or is it the normative way of life for Christians, or is it somehow a combination of the two?

Holiness, for the Church, has all to do with Christlikeness! Doctrines and textbook theology are important as we shall see; but totally, completely, unreservedly belonging to Jesus Christ, and reflecting His spirit and doing His will are ALL-important in this great "mark of the church."

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

"From (Jesus) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (16)

The word "catholic" means world-wide. The church is ONE, it is also for the WHOLE WIDE WORLD! Which simply means that the one church is to be cross-cultural and not only the way WE think it should be!

We exist to build up the church where we worship. The church where we worship exists to support and build up the larger whole of which it is a part. That larger whole may often, perhaps usually, be the denomination or network of similar churches—culturally tied together. But it will inevitably reach across culture barriers, inevitably bring health or weakness to the whole,

No doubt we are all guilty of saying, "So let them come to US! After all WE are the right ones!" In Jerusalem just now, three competing Christian groups hold portions of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, each one sure the other two are in error.

There are many tribes and nations; many different ways of praising the Lord. We may not always be sensitive to each other, but there is a universal LIFE that undergirds the true church wherever it meets.

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

Again we look at Ephesians (4:x) "until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God"

I will not spend any time on this this morning, except to say that our Word, our Truth, our Scripture is and must be the same that was once delivered to the apostles. Times change, methods change, cultures evolve, but the Gospel of God's love in the Life and Death and Life of Jesus remains forever the same, to all eternity!

The church is US! We hold the plumb-lines of the scripture and the marks of the church against the reality of this church where we worship and prepare and seek to serve our Lord. The abstractions "one" and "holy" and "catholic" and "apostolic" want to leap off the pages of the theological textbooks, and challenge us to fuller, deeper service of our Master. They want to stretch our perceptions, and broaden our horizons, and energize our efforts.

The church is not my church! It isn't yours, either. It is HIS church. We belong to the church because we belong to Him!

When you speak, or even think of His one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, never think "they!" Think "US!"

The Church is One

The Marks of the Church Series 2 of 5

Five sermons introducing the universally held theological truth that the church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with application for a church at the end of the twentieth century.

- [The Marks of the Church Introduction](#)
- **The Church is One**
- [The Church is Catholic](#)
- [The Church is Apostolic](#)
- [The Church is Holy](#)

April 14, 1991

Ephesians 4:1-6

We have begun to look at what theologians and church fathers across the centuries have called the "marks" or the "notes" of the church. Coming without apology from an evangelical and scriptural perspective, still we are seeking to avoid the unproductive tension between fundamental-liberal extremists, and perhaps get a fresh look at God's words about the church.

One of the four characteristics that belong to the church universal is the mark or note of UNITY. The Church of Jesus Christ is ONE.

Any study of the church begins with the scriptural concept of faith as corporate, or that which is held in common among all the spiritual fellowship of God's people.

THE IDEA OF CORPORATE FAITH

We are so attuned to think of faith as a purely subjective, individual matter that it is almost startling to find, when we are looking for it, just how "corporate" the concept of faith as expressed in the New Testament really is. Actually, the "corporate nature of faith" shines in both divisions of the Bible:

The Church is One

In the OLD TESTAMENT "salvation" was equivalent to being or becoming a member of the people of God; "damnation" was the equivalent of being cast out or excommunicated from the rest of this group.

The NEW TESTAMENT carries this group identity idea forward; with emphasis on "belonging" to the ekklesia: Jesus called the disciples one by one, and they joined a group (which was the church anticipated during Jesus' ministry;)

The church-in-the-making waited in one accord for the initial Baptism of the Spirit. They carried this UNITY forward throughout the pages of Acts and the New Testament (Galatians 2, etc.) The word "saint" is used in the singular only twice in the New Testament, both times in relationship to the church; all other appearances of the word is in the plural, "saints!"

Speaking of the use of the word "church" to mean the common faith, in his sermon "Of the Church" (vi:392) John Wesley made the statement, "A more ambiguous word than this, the Church, is scarce to be found in the English language. It is sometimes taken for a building, set apart for public worship; sometimes for a congregation, or body of people, united together in the service of God. Wesley goes on to say that when he speaks of the church he means the latter, the "body of people UNITED together in the service of God."

H. Ray Dunning says: The place to begin a study of the church is in the corporate character of biblical faith.

This corporate nature of faith has been an essential part of the church from the beginning. The faith has not been something to "JOIN" like a club or an army or a work force; it has been something to be BAPTIZED INTO, to be BORN AGAIN INTO, to become part of as we change direction, and begin a new way of living.

This corporate nature of faith is still valid; it is still something we need to recapture and re-emphasize. Our individual walk with God is to follow this pattern. The church in other days and other cultures understood this better than we do, perhaps.

It is easy for us to make church a matter of convenience in our weddings and burials and christenings, as well as in our worship. But especially these sacrament-like occasions are set in the context of the strength of the corporate faith.

As Christians we are members of each other! We exist to lift one another up and bless each other. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers!

Our burials should be as often as possible from the church, by the church, in the church; our marriages should be solemnized as sacred services of worship, and reflect the corporate faith, and the fact that the church is the greater family. Our christenings are powerful statements to three worlds that our children belong to Christ's Body, and all others may keep "hands off!"

It is this CORPORATE faith that underlies all we say about the church. The marks of the church have their reality and existence in this shared LIFE.

THE CHURCH IS ONE

We have already recognized that all Christendom has agreed that the Church of Jesus is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The church is:

ONE (and yet it is diverse;)

HOLY (and yet it is very human and imperfect!) The true church is holy because it belongs to a holy God; yet it is imperfect because it has ME (and you) in it! But we are washed in the blood, and are being made in the image of Christ!)

CATHOLIC (world-wide, and yet very local and provincial) The Gospel fits the whole world; and yet there are cultural adaptations; differences, applications.

APOSTOLIC (true to the ancient Word; yet up-to-date and experiential, what we term "confessional!") The true church lives by every word that proceeds from the Father; it abides in the True Vine, the Son.

Just now particularly look at the statement: THE CHURCH IS ONE .

The Church is One

The unity of the church in the love of God was the heart of Jesus' great prayer (in John 17.) All who own allegiance to the One Great Lord of the church are part of a unity for which Jesus prayed.

Painful as it is, we have to live with some unanswered questions about why it is so difficult for all God's children to get together; and why genuine allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ does not more quickly break down barriers of misunderstanding within the family of God. But at the same time, we need to be available to God as His instruments of healing and love within the Body.

There are three outstanding scriptural figures of this unity: these figures are filial and conjugal and organic. The

FILIAL figure is seen in such passages as John 1:12 "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the children of God." Or Romans 8:15 "We have received the Spirit of adoption as children whereby we cry, "Abba! Father!" and Romans 8:29 says the church is "conformed to the image of (God's) Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren."

The church is God's FAMILY. But there is another striking figure of the unity of the church with Jesus Christ, the figure of

CONJUGAL unity, or the marriage of Christ and the Church. In that passage we usually are thinking of earthly family relationships. But if we turn the passage over on its other base like an hourglass, we see the UNITY of the church in relationship to Christ: (Ephesians 5:25)

Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

As husband and wife become one, so the church is ONE with her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is an even closer figure of the unity of the church; that of:

ORGANIC unity. In Ephesians 4:15 we are charged to "Grow up in all aspects into Christ, who is the HEAD (of the Body)." And in Ephesians 5:30 is the startling translation, at least in the KJV,

"We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones!"

The church is to be/to become the very BODY of Jesus Christ here on earth. This is an INCARNATIONAL concept— that as the life of Jesus is breathed into each member of the Body, together we become ONE, and become CHRIST INCARNATE TO THIS WORLD! ["So what?"]

BRINGING THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH HOME WHERE WE ARE

Any sincere study of the church is a useful thing in order to get the inclusive picture; the ideal of what God intends we shall be world-wide; but theology should/must find application in every day living. The great concepts and ideas of theology finally are not simply to inform and educate us, but to become food to eat and sustain and grow us, and make us healthy.

So these "marks of the church" - ONE HOLY CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC -must be reflected in each local congregation: HOW CAN "THE CHURCH IS ONE" TOUCH YOUR LIFE AND MINE?

I would suggest four ways: (The first is NEGATIVE) DON'T BE SUPERFICIAL; this UNITY is always in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 12: No (one) can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. So-called ecumenical services may or may not be helpful; all too often they have an agenda of legitimizing non- Christian "churches."

The second: DO AFFIRM YOUR PERSONAL UNITY with Jesus; as God's children; as being TRUE to God in a personal sense; as being part of the Body of Christ.

Third: DO PRAY FOR AND LOVE CHRISTIANS everywhere. Look for Jesus in people other than our own Wesleyan family. One of the greatest evils in God's sight is being unwilling to maintain the UNITY of the true church. In New Testament vision, there is no greater sin than schism. Listen to John Wesley again:

The Church is One

"I dare not exclude from the Church catholic all those congregations in which any unscriptural doctrines, which cannot be affirmed by "the pure word of God," are sometimes, yea, frequently preached; neither all those congregations, in which the sacraments are not "duly administered." . (and here Wesley specifically mentions the Church of Rome with which he disagreed in many ways). . . "Whoever they are that have 'one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all,' I can easily bear with their holding wrong opinions, yea, and superstitious modes of worship: Nor would I, on these accounts, scruple still to include them within the pale of the catholic Church [small "c"]; neither would I have any objection to receive them, if they desired it, as members of the Church of England." (op cit next page)

Fourth and finally: DO IDENTIFY WITH THE CHURCH RIGHT WHERE YOU WORSHIP EVERY SUNDAY ! In your heart, with your mouth think and say "WE" and never "THEY!"

There is no doubt that it is easier to love the "perfect church" of theory, or to think of some greater, more "together" fellowship in some far city. But here and now, where you and I worship together, imperfect as we are, we are Christ's Body— we are part of His ONE GREAT CHURCH!

Am I saying that we ought to quit being denominational Nazarenes? Not at all! I am saying that we already belong to one great Church which we had better love and appreciate and work and pray toward its health and success in showing a needy world the love of its Lord. We have the opportunity where we are of reflecting God's will that the Church be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Amen.

The Church is Catholic

The Marks of the Church Series 3 of 5

Five sermons introducing the universally held theological truth that the church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with application for a church at the end of the twentieth century.

- [The Marks of the Church Introduction](#)
- [The Church is One](#)
- **The Church is Catholic**
- [The Church is Apostolic](#)
- [The Church is Holy](#)

April 21, 1991

Romans 11:33 - 12:8

Introduction

We have said that every orthodox church regards the marks of the church to be four: The church is One, Holy, Apostolic, Catholic. When we speak of Catholicity, we speak of that which the One church [Where the WORD is preached, and where the sacraments are administered] has in common world-wide. The WORD to be preached, of course, is the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

It will not do to begin by making sweeping statements. We begin, rather, with a statement of awe and mystery:

THE CHURCH ISSUES IN THE UNFATHOMABLE GLORY OF GOD

11:33 - Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How UNSEARCHABLE are His judgments and UNFATHOMABLE His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen

Before we make any pronouncements on what the church world wide is, or what we believe it ought to be, we need to begin with the mercies of God! We are all created in God's image, and are the objects of His love. We are made to love and adore and fellowship with Him. If our worship, and if the church are connected with Him, they carry with them truth and beauty and life beyond the narrow scope of our understanding. Romans 12:1,2 is very practical and straightforward. It is familiar territory to evangelical Christians. We like to jump in right here, at the practical side, and go for the decision. "Just do it!" And any way we can get people to meet God is great!

But remember, Romans 12:1 has a "therefore" in it. And the "therefore" points back to the doxology of praise in Romans 11:33-36. Paul comes to the end of a doctrinal passage, a great treatise on grace and salvation and he breaks into this hymn of praise, and THEN he says, "Because of all this great love of a great God, give yourself to HIM; become part of His Body, the Church!"

One of the most important, if not the most important quality of the true catholic church is humility before the wonder God's love, the wonder of being invited into God's inner circle, into God's very Presence. The WONDER! The WONDER of it all! What the text calls our "spiritual service of worship" all springs out of the mercies of God! This is beautiful truth beyond our comprehension!

The preaching of the Word and the Sacraments represent two places where the Living Word makes contact with us, two sides of the same great truth. Preaching is logical and presses for decision. Sacraments are visual or representative, and speak of the unspeakable and mysterious. Across the centuries churches have tended to emphasize one aspect over the other.

Sons and daughters of the church who have been exposed only to narrowly held segments of God's truth (on either side) may tend to rebel when they begin to see the truth of the wider whole. Then, unless they are careful, they re-act humanly, and swing far over to other emphases. We do not know and certainly do not own the whole orb of truth. "(Don't) think more highly of (yourselves) than you ought" (12:3) This can be applied to churches, too! The fact is that we CANNOT own it all, and we

do not NEED to own it all. But Catholic is that which the One church has in common; that which is common to all churches that are true churches. How does the Reformation formula apply to the whole church (including our own)?

THE ENTIRE CHURCH IS CALLED TO SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

(12:1-3)

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is. that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We do not have a monopoly on worship; and neither does any other segment of the church! The entire church catholic worships. The call to "spiritual service" is not limited to evangelical young people at a youth camp; it is not a call just to Mother Teresa in Calcutta— it is a call to the entire church of Jesus Christ everywhere.

But there seem to be so many different ways of worship! Some seem so emotional! Some seem so dead and dry and formal! What is genuine "spiritual service?" What constitutes the church? Before we look at the forms we have to consider the content. Jesus Himself said, in Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst!" Whatever our definitions, Jesus is the Living Word!

[Bishop Michael Baughan spoke here several years ago. He told of 300 churches in the See of Chester, England, which are under his care, that use the same form or liturgy. But Bishop Baughan said that as he went from one church to the next, on church would "worship" and another would simply go through a form. The difference was the evident Presence of the Living Word among those worshipping.

We come back to the Reformation definitions: Where the Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments administered, there is the church! Can we summarize "catholic elements of worship" in the context of this definition? What should we expect to be a part of the church universal at worship?: (As we have said:)

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS IS A UNIVERSAL

"JESUS CHRIST is the Word of God. Where Jesus Christ is Present by His Holy Spirit, there is the church!" If the differences of language and culture could be overcome, any Christian OUGHT to feel "at home" in any other Christian service of worship. Granted, sometimes these culture barriers are formidable; and sometimes Jesus takes second place to the forms which have sprung up; but where Jesus is present, there is the church!

THE BIBLE IS A UNIVERSAL

THE BIBLE proclaims the Word of God. The church of Jesus Christ will always give a central allegiance to the written Word of God. It is impossible to think of a Church without the Bible.

The Bible is God's revelation given in human language. The Bible itself is a mystery of incarnation. It is possible to err into bibliolatry, to "go off" on worship of the Bible; to make one interpretation of infallibility a by-word of true catholicity. But it is impossible to have a church without the authority of scripture. The authentic role of scripture is to proclaim Jesus Christ. (John 5:39)

PREACHING IS A UNIVERSAL

PREACHING makes the Word of God contemporary. The church of Jesus Christ will always have men and women called to proclaim Jesus Christ in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Preaching is a central catholic function of the Body of Christ. The scripture says,

"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe." (1 Co 1:18,21)

The end of preaching is not sermons. Don't misunderstand me, I think I understand something of the art and craft of sermon building. I know a good one when I hear it; I

know a bad one when I preach it. But the end of preaching is to make Jesus available; to proclaim that He is here, now, today!

Sermon-crafting is a respectable profession, I suppose. Yet it is possible to be so involved in perfect sermons that Jesus gets lost along the way. But preaching is God's method for making His Word come alive in the church. It always will be. So be it!

SACRAMENTS ARE A UNIVERSAL

SACRAMENTS somehow communicate the Word of God. When I say "sacrament" I would include the whole concept of liturgy, or how we worship, and what we DO when we get together to worship.

Just as some Protestant communions can let the sacred scriptures almost take the place of God Himself, and substitute a literal, legalistic interpretation of the Bible as spiritual fact, even so some Liturgical communions can come to elevate the Sacrament and the Exercise of Worship to a place where it is an end in and of itself, when properly understood it is meant to be a vehicle of communicating God's Presence.

The sacraments are not meant to convey a false sense of security that excuses Christians from obeying the Word and walking humbly before God. And doing everything just as it is "written down in the proper book" is no indication of an authentic sacrament. Daniel Jenkins (in his book *The Nature of Catholicity*) says, "a passionate devotion to the Sacrament (MAY) mask a spiritual laziness which destroys the meaning of the Sacrament(!)"

Probably most Christian services would include: (1) Prayer recognizing God's Presence and seeking to adore and worship Him; and (2) Reading of scripture; (3) Proclamation of the Word, or preaching in the Spirit's anointing (4) Call for response of some kind; including an offering, but certainly not limited to that; sometimes the 'sacrifice of praise' in testimony;

And all orthodox churches also periodically observe (5) The actual Sacraments themselves (Baptism and Communion) as well as Sacrament-like services, as Ordination, Christening, Marriage, Burials, and the like.

In addition, most Christian churches have some form of confession and absolution. Wesleyans have lived with Wesley's definition of sin as "a willful transgression of a known law of God" so long that often we have trouble realizing that even Wesleyans are to pray the Lord's Prayer all the way through, too!

Finally, the proclamation of the Word is not limited to preaching and the sacraments for...

SOME FORM OF DISCIPLINE IS A UNIVERSAL

DISCIPLINE reveals the Word of God. The true catholic church of Jesus Christ will have discipline. By "discipline" I mean the living OUT of the LIFE which Christ has placed within us; unless the Church manifests its life there is no life there!

CALLED TO BE OURSELVES; CALLED TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH

No corner of the church has perfect fullness. But it is possible to rejoice in the extent where Christ has made us strong, and also rejoice for the Presence of Jesus Christ in others. We can seek to make Jesus the center and the reason for our worship! His manifest Presence is the true "catholic" manifestation, the one true universal element of worship.

We can pray for the entire Church catholic without being unfaithful in any wise to our own family, the Church of the Nazarene. In fact we will be better Nazarenes if we seek to be first of all better Christians! The Holy Spirit would inspire within us a genuine prayer for His coming in power throughout His whole church.

I talked with Nancy Powers yesterday; she shared with me some of the concerns of a priest in our area who genuinely cares about the needs of people, and who seeks to meet those needs in Jesus' name. [Bill McCarthy, St. John the Baptist, 7,000 families. Will you join with me in praying for Fr. Bill McCarthy and his ministry in our city?]

The Church is Apostolic

The Marks of the Church Series 4 of 5

Five sermons introducing the universally held theological truth that the church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with application for a church at the end of the twentieth century.

- [The Marks of the Church Introduction](#)
- [The Church is One](#)
- [The Church is Catholic](#)
- **The Church is Apostolic**
- [The Church is Holy](#)

April 28, 1991

[Lesson Ephesians 2:14-22]

The entire Christian church agrees that the church is, or is supposed to be "apostolic" in nature. And yet as you might expect, there are several different explanations of just what it means to be a part of the apostolic church.

THE APOSTOLIC POSITION

Some people say the apostolic power lies in the church itself. They think first of all of the Apostles themselves, and say that the church is apostolic because there is an unbroken line of authority handed down from St. Peter to the present time.

This view says that Jesus gave authority to these men, particularly to Peter; these men then passed that authority along in an unbroken line of bishops to the present. The Church that has this unbroken line of authority (meaning the RC church) is the sole repository of grace and thus of salvation.

This represents the old Augustinian/ Catholic view of the church as "apostolic" [which has moderated a great deal, particularly since Vatican II.]

The Church is Apostolic

This is an historical impossibility to prove. The church HAS come down across the centuries. It IS an unbroken witness, but not because of the unbroken line of bishops.

Other people say apostolic authority is the authority of the scriptures. This view looks at the pure Gospel that was preached by the Apostles, and says the church is apostolic when there is faithful adherence to this message. This view says the "ROCK" on which Jesus was to build His church was the confession, "Thou art the Christ!" and not Peter himself.

We believe that the witness of these men HAS been handed down to us in the Scriptures. Their testimony, which most of the apostles sealed with their own blood, has been passed along unbroken, and is with us in the Bible today.

This represents the Lutheran/Reformation view of the church, or more broadly, the classical position of all Protestantism.

Once again, however, caution is needed. It is possible to be militant in defending what we believe to be the "true infallibility" of the Bible, and be out of touch with the Spirit of Jesus. British theologian Daniel Jenkins warns:

"The crude appeal to the letter of the Scriptures, with no attention to the experience of the Spirit-guided Church, means not only a woeful impoverishment of the Church's life and worship; it frequently means also a crabbed and narrow interpretation of the Scriptures." (44)

No church can be apostolic without faithfulness to the scriptures, there is no question about that. But it takes more than the letter of the Word to make a church an apostolic church.

A third view sees the apostolic foundation of the church in the righteous living of the saints. This view claims that somehow an apostolic church has to recapture the EXPERIENCE AND THE MIRACLES OF THE APOSTLES, which, of course, the people who take this position are sure they have re-discovered.

In this view apostolic succession is totally discounted; and theological preaching and the sacraments diminished in comparison to individual experience and rigid interpretation of bible discipline. What matters is personal experience, how the individual "feels" about his or her relationship to God. But this is always dangerous: Emil Brunner once wrote (Philosophy of Religion)

"When once the main interest is fastened on subjective experience, the objective element, the Word, dwindles to a mere means of stimulus— for what matters is the "inward working." (41) (cited by Jenkins)

Again at the risk of over-simplification, this is an extreme Anabaptist position, that of an independent church; the role of the apostle is taken by the sect or the strong personality. The Church becomes a mere association of Christians gathering for mutual edification.

In summary, some people think the apostolic authority is in the institution of the church, in its bishops; some think it lies solely in the Bible and correct theological understanding; and some believe it belongs in the individual experience "rightly" interpreted.

If I had to choose between an unbroken line of authority; an undiluted Gospel of the apostles; or finding the experience and lifestyle of the apostles, my choice would be closer to the second, or Reformation position than any other.

But before we obligate ourselves to any one position, think with me about the function or role or calling of an apostle.

THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE

The text says that Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone of the church which is being built on the apostolic foundation. Any view of what it means to be apostolic is only valid as it rests firmly and squarely on a relationship with Jesus Christ. Look with me at the calling of the original apostles:

There are some things that an apostle was not!

The Church is Apostolic

To be an apostle definitely was NOT a matter of obvious greatness or brilliance or intellect. No doubt all these men became truly great men; but it was a greatness that developed out of their dedication to their Master. It was a greatness that even then was not apparent to the world; a greatness that I believe is available to you and me even today.

The apostles were not great innovators or keen publicity agents. To be an apostle was NOT to develop schemes with which to turn their culture around. As a rule these men seemed rather reluctant to leave Jerusalem, and discovered their opportunities only when they were thrust out into the harsh realities of an alien culture. (See Acts 8:1)

The men whom became such great leaders were weak, often prejudiced, had painful and severe quarrels and misunderstandings— and yet somehow the church is supposed to be like them!

So, just WHO AND WHAT WERE the apostles? Simply stated, the apostles were men who were CALLED by Jesus, and they had just three things, basically, to do:

An apostle had to be someone who knew Jesus. Personally and intimately. They had to be called by Jesus to be with Him. Not everyone He called followed. Not everyone who wanted to tag along was permitted. Apostles knew how Jesus lived. They knew how He died. Most of all, apostles knew Jesus after the resurrection. They knew Jesus was still very much alive.

Apostles were committed to serve Jesus. They were not called to give Jesus advice, they were His servants! Apostles had surrendered their rights to themselves. They were NOT to be "big shots" or innovators. Some of them early on did get delusions of grandeur. But they were severely chastised for it, too! Ultimately they came to love God's will more than they loved their own lives!

Most of all, the apostles were commissioned to tell to the world what they knew. More than one scholar says something like this: (Jenkins)

"It (was) not their faith or their zeal or their religious genius or any special charismata they possessed, like the gift of the Spirit by the laying on of hands, and

certainly not any accident of historical association, but their testimony which constitute(d) them Apostles." (25)

Some of them developed into profound theologians and scholars, as Paul and John did; some of them no doubt were tremendous leaders, heading up the organization of a regional church as Peter did. But whatever else they were, first and foremost they were witnesses to tell what they knew in the power of the indwelling Presence of God in their lives! Not what they speculated, or what they heard each other say, but they were to tell only what they KNEW! It was a convincing testimony!

The Church of Jesus Christ exists today to carry out the apostolic task. It is this witness, and not the men themselves, or even the verbatim words of the Gospel, or the emotional or pietistic experience of these men that makes the church truly "apostolic."

THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

The entire CHURCH is called to the Great Commission. IN THE GREAT COMMISSION THE ENTIRE CHURCH IS CALLED TO THE APOSTOLIC TASK! There is an interesting paragraph in the next (3rd) chapter (7-13). Paul says the apostle's task that fell to him is now to be manifested through the church. And Paul does not limit this witness to evangelism- he says the church will witness to all creation.

Jesus Himself (and not the church) must be the center of our witness. A person who is promoting the Church first can have a religion which is really "Glory be to ME!" "We're Number One!" To reject the servant role is to lose the apostolic commission.

The ONLY reason for existence of the Church is to carry forward this apostolic function of lifting up the risen Savior. Our relationship with Jesus must underlie everything we do.

Our public worship should call people away from the spirit of our godless world; it should even turn people away from preoccupation with themselves, and from any worship of mere outward forms to see God's LOVE in the FACE of the risen Savior.

The Church is Apostolic

Our personal commitment to Jesus will reflect a willing submission to His Lordship. We will take seriously the Bible's claim that eternal life is ONLY in knowing God.

It is a humbling thing to be called to follow the apostolic tradition. It is a sobering thing to know that Jesus has said to YOU, personally, "FOLLOW ME!"

That is the reason many of you are here today!

But if Jesus has called you, there is no other way except to submit to His authority, and follow HIM! Or else, to count the cost, as did the Rich Young Ruler, and go sadly away. There is no middle ground.

In a community where intellectual keenness is highly valued, submission of the intellect may be seen as anti-intellectual. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Obscurantism and rationalism and other forms of self-delusion are forms of dishonesty, and Jesus Christ never tolerates dishonesty for a moment! But if we determine instead, from a place outside of submission by faith to the integrity of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, or what is true and what is nonsense,, we misunderstand the whole purpose of theology. We are elevating the our own thoughts and the discoveries of science, of philosophy or psychology or anthropology or sociology by an act of our own sovereign will to equality with Revealed truth.

We can come to the inner assurance that all of life must relate to the Presence of Jesus Christ. Our highest witness then will be a consistency of life and living.

You don't have to be a great talker to be a great apostolic witness! [The greatest testimonies to the Reality of God are testimonies of people going through the fire!

Prayer: Lord, If you are calling us, we are following! Help us know You better! Help us serve You! And let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy Peace! Amen.

The Church is Holy

Five sermons introducing the universally held theological truth that the church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with application for a church at the end of the twentieth century.

- [The Marks of the Church Introduction](#)
- [The Church is One](#)
- [The Church is Catholic](#)
- [The Church is Apostolic](#)
- **The Church is Holy**

May 5, 1991

Ephesians 5:25 "... Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it, that he might make it holy with His own blood, and present it to Himself pure and radiant, without any spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless."

In the Bible account of Gideon you may recall that Israel was being menaced by enemies (Midian) and the nation was in terror. Gideon, the hero of the story was himself hiding as he threshed out his harvest when an angel appeared to him and said, "Hail, mighty man of valor! The LORD is with thee!"

Gideon didn't know if the angel was making fun of him, or was just very near-sighted! He did not know either his own potential or God's design for his life!

By the same terms, if a letter came to your house addressed to "the saints" at your residence, how would you respond? Or, when you read or hear read the challenge anywhere in the Bible: "Be ye holy for I the Lord your God Am Holy!" how do you receive it?

The very idea of "holy" or "holiness" invokes strong reactions. In general there are two:

One response to holiness says, "Who me?" Then with a great show of humility the heavy responsibility of sainthood or holiness is ever so lightly pushed aside.

The other response says, "I will be holy!" But then it proceeds to define the beginning and ending of the call to holiness strictly in the individual, in the "me."

THERE IS A PERSONAL CALL TO HOLINESS

...which cannot be ignored. YES, GOD CALLS US PERSONALLY: (re: Romans 12:1,2)

God calls EACH of us, deals with us, convicts and convinces us, so that we might be enabled to fellowship with Him. God calls EACH OF US TO HIMSELF. To be "holy" means we are in a special relationship to God.

Our "holiness" is not a "LOAD OF GOODNESS" that makes US "holy" in all we do or say. ONLY GOD IS HOLY in any underived way. All holiness comes from HIM.

But God cannot fellowship with the unholy. He wants us to fellowship with Him. So we have this dilemma: you have to be holy to come near to God, and you can't come near to God unless you are holy. It is sort of like you can't get a job without experience, and you can't get experience without a job.

So— what can be done? The thing to realize is what HOLY is, what it means. "Holy" means "set apart." My parking space is "set apart" to me; this church building is "holy" in a sense in that it is "set apart" for the worship of God. TO BE GOD'S IS TO BE HOLY:

But things don't have any say in whom they shall belong to; people do. Still, what is God's IS holy! So, the struggle is not to make ourselves holy so that we can approach God; WE CANNOT DO THAT OURSELVES!

Somehow the struggle is not to be HOLY— but to give ourselves wholly away to God, and to know that He has accepted our gift. What is HIS— He makes holy!

And strange as it may seem, part of the "giving away," the consecration, involves identifying with God's holy church!

TO BE HOLY INVOLVES BEING PART OF GOD'S HOLY CHURCH

Our passion for personal holiness must flow into a holy love for Christ's church if it reflects Christ's own kind of love.

"Holy" has been preached almost exclusively from a personal, experiential approach. We have measured our holiness by the inner, emotional response ("I feel sweet, or peace, or feel love"), by what we sense personally, enabling: ("I am not ashamed to testify" "I find that I can forgive.") And while this personal side is absolutely valid and necessary, yet it can be extremely centered in self!

The corrective for self-centered holiness, an oxymoron if there ever was one, is remembering that we are to be sanctified in relationship to Christ's church, which is to be HOLY!

GOD'S CALL "BE HOLY!" IS ALWAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH IS THE FOCUS OF CHRIST'S LOVE. Look again at the scripture which declares: "... Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it, that he might make it holy with His own blood, and present it to Himself pure and radiant, without any spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25)

THE CHURCH CAME TO LIFE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Peter preached: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel!" THE CHURCH'S CALL TO HOLINESS INCORPORATES THE INDIVIDUAL 'PERSONAL CALL TO HOLINESS' AND MORE:

The CHURCH is to be united with God by the sanctifying grace: Jesus prayed (John 17:17) Sanctify them: "That they may be one with us." The CHURCH is promised the empowering Spirit: Acts 1:8 - The CHURCH received admonition and challenge from the glorified Savior in Revelation 2,3

HOLINESS IN THIS CORPORATE SENSE BECOMES A SUBMITTING AND SURRENDERING TO MAKE THE CHURCH MUCH MORE THAN OUR INDIVIDUAL TESTIMONY CAN BE. This is a risky, scary thing: to submit one's individual rights into a sense of community.

In the 1960s Hippies tried it— and they were disillusioned every single time! James Jones persuaded hundreds to experiment with submission; the results were disastrous.

The Church is Holy

Still, there it is: the disciples had all things in common; they relinquished their own rights.

What principle is this?

THE HOLY CHURCH WILL MANIFEST GOD'S LIFE IN THIS WORLD

The LOVE of God - The COMPASSION OF HOLINESS must be manifested in the context of the corporate faith. The Apostle John said the greatest "selling point" the church has is: BEHOLD HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER!

The COMMUNION of God - THE COMMUNITY OF HOLINESS must also be manifested in the corporate faith. The church described in Acts 2 was manifestly unselfish! They gave whatever they had in order to make the kingdom go forward. "THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON!"

We can re-capture some of that "belonging"! The nursery needs to be staffed. Little children need to be cared for. People need to be loved and prayed for. It isn't a matter of communism, or giving, although in my mind tithing is a "floor."

The LIFE of God - THE VIBRANT REALITY OF HOLINESS will also be made manifest in the corporate faith! [I am not speaking of synthetic excitement.] When God meets with His HOLY CHURCH it is always an enormously important occasion!

Some time ago in some church promotional literature one "managerial-type" pastor likened his church to a filling station. HE SAID: "The 'real world' is out 'on the road.' "

I take exception.

The church is like a home. THIS sanctuary is a dining room. The meal is fuel for the tasks to be done. But it is also a sacrament of love.

Physically, in our individual homes, too much of our eating is 'fast food' filling station mentality. HAPPY is the family that several times a week sits down together in love to eat, talk, laugh, think, remember, enjoy each other.

Spiritually, it IS true that what the church does 'out on the road' IS vital; WE are the only way that Jesus gets "out of the Bible, out of the four walls of the church."

But what we do IN the church is much more than a smelly, selfish gas station. It is more than "tanking up."

We are family- God's HOLY family! We LOVE each other! When we eat, Paul said, wait for each other!

SO, HOW IS THE CHURCH 'HOLY?'

You [PERSONALLY] are called to holiness as a child of God.

The church is holy because YOU are holy! Like Gideon, the angel is saying to you, "HAIL, YOU SAINT! YOU ARE A MIGHTY CHILD OF GOD!" And you are already sanctified, if you are a Christian at all- - for you are dedicated, given, baptized into the Body of Christ. You are being sanctified God wants to sanctify you through and through, with His cleansing reaching every deliberately surrendered part until in a crisis of consecration you will know you have said an everlasting "YES!" to His love. And one day we shall be sanctified completely! In a way we cannot imagine, "When we shall see Him we shall be like Him!"

The church is HOLY if it is God's church! We [AS GOD'S CHURCH!] are called to holiness as a unit. We can have the baptism of the Holy Spirit that fosters compassion.

I get tired of seminars, and of super-stars, and of methods and techniques.

But we must avoid any false humility that says, "I'm no saint! We're no super-church! Holiness? Holiness is for the day of the kerosene lamp and the button-down shoes. We can't have that kind of powerful fellowship!"

Can't we?

I'm going to ask you to join with me in the closing prayer today, A JOINT AFFIRMATION that we belong to God as a church!

Prayer:

WE, THE WOLLASTON CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE, AFFIRM THAT WE BELONG TO YOU, O GOD. WE BELIEVE THAT WHAT BELONGS TO YOU IS TRULY HOLY. WE ASK

The Church is Holy

THAT YOU WILL MAKE US WHOLLY YOURS THAT WE MIGHT WALK WITH YOU AND FELLOWSHIP WITH YOU AND OBEY YOU IN ALL THAT WE SAY AND DO, THAT YOU MAY HAVE YOUR PERFECT WILL IN OUR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE. AMEN.