

Hey world, this is your church

Matthew 16:17-19

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"

Jesus established the church – the community of people that bear his name.

The setting is a Kingdom battle. Hell v heaven acted out, at least in part, through the people who follow Jesus. He gives us keys to open Heaven's gates and bring heaven to earth.

What does that look like?

What part are you going to play?

When you decide to follow Jesus it is not a passport into an easy life but into citizenship of a kingdom which is at war.

We live in the already and the not yet – whilst we await Jesus' return we are in a kingdom battle.

What has the Church become after Jesus instituted it 2000 years ago? A building, an institution, a Sunday morning service, the people?

Imagine a big neon sign outside the building – "this is your church". What would people's responses be?

"My church? Am I welcome? What is it? What does it do? Why is it mine?"

1. A member of another church
2. An atheist
3. Someone who is gay
4. Someone who is a "bad" person
5. Moslem, Jew, Sikh, Hindu, Jehovah's Witness

Barna research

57% Christian, 9% practising Christian

6 in 10 English adults believe that Jesus was a real person.

- 21% believe Jesus is God – 1 in 5

- 2/3rds of non-Christians know a practicing Christian (mainly friends or family member)

English non-Christians attribute more positive than negative qualities to the Christians they know.

- Overwhelmingly positive – 2/3rds friendly, half caring and good humoured.
- One in ten – negative – narrow minded, hypocritical, homophobic
- Majority will connect with Jesus, majority will feel positively.
- Some will not connect at all.
- A small number will have negative thoughts.
- We are legally free to do/be church.

By and large people like you (the church), they are open to conversation with you and they think good things about Jesus.

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

At the start of the church, 2000 years ago, society was integrated and the church community grew up within it.

It did good things, demonstrated love – but also challenged authority (the gates of hell) and demanded total sacrifice and allegiance to the King Jesus (not the emperor)

People around them would ask “Who are you?” And they would answer, “we are your church.”

In the intervening centuries we have separated from society

The church has ended up separate, over there, shouting “we are your church” – and rather than pride, we became embarrassed.

How can the church operate today in an individualistic society?

Post modernism, relativity, individualism, break up of society.

Pace of change, discontinuance, chaotic and rapidly changing.

Disruptive technology. Fragmented society.

The Social Integration Commission (a unique social experiment which has attempted to map thousands of people's social networks to determine how closely people of different classes and generations mix in modern Britain in 2014) used a technique developed by experimental psychologists at Oxford University. Statisticians analysed information provided by a sample of 4,269 people about their own social lives.

The results clearly showed that the church is where the most diverse groups are welcome.

- Different ages (sporting occasions are also good)
- Different Ethnic groups (the church is way ahead)
- Different social background (the church is a long way ahead)

Despite having a history of being over "there" – the church is still a cohesive force in our society.

The Vineyard doesn't want to be over "there". We want to be right in amongst this fragmented society, saying, "we are your church". Come as you are, everyone is welcome.

Church amongst the fragments

I have a vision for being church, an integrated community of faith, stuck right into the maelstrom of a fragmented world.

We have the keys of the kingdom to extend God's rule and reign.

What is Jesus seeking to build? A community like Acts 2 – doing life together and having favour with the people.

I can see hundreds of people coming and going out.

In – for sanctuary, worship, message of hope and wisdom, a safe community, nurture.

Out – to build bridges into our community, explaining who Jesus is and how he can become Lord and Saviour, forgiveness for sins and freedom from prison and a purpose on this planet. Praying for the sick, feeding the hungry, restoring families, shining light in dark places, casting out demons, being great neighbours. Winning Headingley for the kingdom, winning your neighbourhood for the kingdom.

And when people say why, who, what? The answer is "this is your church".

Do you want to be part of this church? I invite you to be part of this church.

As you surrender to God's love and are redeemed and changed ...

You can be used by God to change this community, city, country.

What is God saying to you about being "church" amongst the fragments?

What are you going to do about it?

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