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Pastor Bill MacDonald
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Fearless Q: Is Christianity About Me or We?

John 13:34-5, 17:20-24

November 20, 1982: My last college football game as a student at the University of California Berkeley. CAL looked like they were going to end their season against Stanford the way they had ended so many of their previous games that season... losing in the final seconds. Stanford quarterback John Elway had marched his team down field late in the fourth quarter and scored a touchdown with only seconds remaining. Cal fans were crushed. Dreams for a big game victory over arch-rival Stanford were swirling down the drain rapidly. The student section at Memorial Coliseum was silent... everyone thinking the same thing: Not again!

Then it happened! [[youtube.com/watch?v=mfebplfAt8g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfebplfAt8g)] This series of laterals became known as "The Play." It has gone down as one of the most memorable finishes in college football history. It was my last game as a student at Cal. And a memory I will never forget.

Sometimes final events or final conversations are truly memorable.

Jesus engaged in a final conversation with his disciples that was truly memorable. And the apostle John did a masterful job remembering and recording that conversation for all the rest of the world to hear. Theologians call it "The Last Discourse" and it's found in John 13-17.

Today as we continue our Fearless Q series, we are going to respond to some questions you had about the Church. The Church with a capital "C"—all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Here are a few of the questions you asked about the Church:

- Why can't my faith just be about me and Jesus? Why do I need the Church?
- I've been really hurt by "the Church." If God calls Christians to love unconditionally, then why don't they show more grace?
- Why is the Church so divided?
- Why are there so many denominations in the world when we believe in the same God?

These are hard questions to hear, especially those questions from people who have been wounded by the Church. Because the Church is **us**... it's you and me. Some of you sitting here today have been wounded by the Church, but you're here! Praise

God. However, because you've been wounded you may be thinking "I don't want to get too involved. I don't want to get too close to people, because they "bite" and it hurts. That may be keeping you from joining a LifeGroup or serving in a ministry here at Chapel Hill. I don't know. But if that's you, keep listening today.

Others of you have wounded others in the Church, and you may be sitting here today aware (or unaware) of your need to ask for and receive God's forgiveness.

And if you've lived in the church for a good part of your life and served in leadership, you've probably been on both ends—you've been hurt and you've hurt others! If that's you, welcome to the club!! Hopefully, today's message will have something for all of us!

I want to read a few verses from Jesus' last conversation with his disciples in John 13-17, because the things that Jesus said at his last gathering with his disciples turn out to be really important for us to know as the Church. And they answer some of the questions people are asking.

"A new command I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, so you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35 (ESV)

And from John 17:20-23 – Jesus' prayer for future believers

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

Let's first let me briefly summarize John 13-17 as a whole—Jesus' final conversation with his disciples. Think about this for a moment: In a final meeting, Jesus wants to sum up his three-year mission and ministry in such a way that his disciples are going to remember it for years to come.

So what does Jesus do first in John 13? He feeds them; He puts food in their bellies, so they can listen. Then He washes their feet. The disciples were "all in" with the eating part, sitting around talking with each other and talking with Jesus. They liked that part—guys like sitting around, eating, drinking and shooting the breeze! But then Jesus starts washing their feet and they get uncomfortable really fast.

But Jesus is modeling something for his disciples that He wants them to remember long after he is gone. He wants them to remember and emulate the essence of His

ministry which is servanthood. Jesus wants them to learn to serve one another sacrificially—the same way Jesus served them. He sums it up in John 13:34-35:

“A new command I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, so you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35 (ESV)

In John 14 Jesus breaks the news to his disciples that he’s going away. They get flustered, because they’ve sacrificed everything to follow him, but he reassures them that he is coming back so he can get them to be where he is.

In John 15 Jesus and the disciples leave the dinner table and take a walk and they pass by a vineyard. And Jesus looks at the vineyard and says “I am the vine; you are the branches.” And he teaches them that they cannot do his will and his ministry unless the branches are connected to the vine. They must be of one mind, one heart, one purpose.

In John 16 Jesus explains more about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And in John 17 Jesus prays for the disciples and for future disciples.

Here’s what I want us to notice about the verses I read from Jesus’ prayer:

1. It’s simple. The prayer Jesus prays in John 17 is simple. It is not rule-laden. It’s not full of “have tos”, “ought tos” or “should dos.” It is not a “to do” list prayer for the disciples... things to remember to do when he’s gone. It is simple and direct.

2. It’s also relational. Jesus prays several times that “they may be one as we are one.” The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a unique, complete, loving relationship within the Godhead. Perfect unity. Jesus prays for his disciples and for his future disciples that they will be one, just as Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one. Jesus prays that his disciples will be brought to complete unity. Why? So that the world will know that the Father sent Jesus and that the Father loves them as much as He loves the Son. Think about that for a moment. Jesus prays to the Father that all of his disciples will be so united in Him that when the world looks at the Church they might understand that God (the Father) sent Jesus (the Son) and that the Father loves the world as much as he loves his Son. “For God so loved the world that He sent his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life!” Jesus’ prayer is simple, it’s relational, and because it’s relational, it’s communal.

3. It’s communal. It’s not just “me and Jesus.” It’s me, and Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the other disciples—unity and community, together being of one mind and heart in Christ. Paul said in Philippians: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5 (ESV) It is absolutely critical for the world to see the Church of one heart and mind in Christ, because when they see this, then they will know that the Father sent the Son, and that the Father loves

them, just as he loves the Son. The Church is God's instrument to reach the world so the world might experience his reconciling love. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses sins against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Our unity in Christ is one way the world sees and experiences God's love for them.

I was at the Celebrate Recovery Summit last week with 28 staff and volunteers, mostly from Chapel Hill. One young man, new to our group, said that he was looking for a recovery family where he would be accepted. He shared his story with me and with others... a story with a lot of hurt and brokenness; a person looking for a loving and accepting family.

People are hungry for love! People come to church looking, hoping to find people who will love them, who will accept them, who are open to friendship. The more broken our world gets the more people are seeking love. Many look for love in the wrong ways and in the wrong places; we pray they eventually find the love they are seeking by finding Christ in the Church.

Going back to a few of our original questions:

- Why can't my faith just be about me and Jesus? Why do I need the Church?
- I've been really hurt by "the Church." If God calls Christians to love unconditionally then why don't they show more grace?
- Why is the Church so divided?

You need the Church because it is God's chosen instrument to reach the world. You need the Church to receive love and to give love; that's why you need to be in a LifeGroup. You need to receive God's love from specific people in the body of Christ, and you need to give love through your encouragement. That's why everyone here would benefit by being in a life group.

When the Church is truly being the Church, the world sees God's love for the world—its care for the poor, its care for the broken and the downtrodden. When the world sees that the Church is truly trying to be like Jesus, they become curious. They become open to the Lord. Why? Because people are looking for a place to be loved and accepted, and they want to be part of something that is greater than themselves. They want to be part of a movement that is serving others who need help.

That's why it cannot just be about "me and Jesus." God never intended it to be that way. God's intention is for the Church to reflect the perfect love that is experienced in the community of the Trinity—between the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We need each other to do that. We can't do it alone!! The world witnesses God's love in us most powerfully when we're united in Christ as the Church.

This week your pastors were on a two-day Prayer Retreat in Port Orchard. We were led by the Prayer Team who did an extraordinary job leading and teaching us on prayer. At the end the pastors divided up into two groups and prayed for each other. Megan, Ellis and I were teamed up together.

When Megan prayed for me God brought something up that was different and unexpected. Megan prayed that God would establish "markers" in my spirit—places of remembrance where God was present like he did with people in the Old Testament. When I asked Megan later what that meant, she commented that maybe God wanted to "rename" or redeem painful events from the past. The next day when I was preparing this sermon, all by myself, I thought about this and I cried... all by myself at the computer, I sobbed.

Here's what I've learned: God never wastes a hurt. He always has something that he wants to teach us through a hurt so we will grow in our wisdom and knowledge, our ability to forgive, and so that we will possess a greater compassion for others who have been hurt.

If you've been wounded by the Church, God wants to heal you. He doesn't want you to be holding onto hurts from other people, and He doesn't want you to keep the Church at arm's length either. He wants you to be engaged with the Church. He wants you to be engaged in relationships through LifeGroups or through ministries like Celebrate Recovery. He wants you to be serving by using your gifts.

I believe this is a timely message because we are getting ready to focus on "prayer" over the next 9 months. More prayer is going to happen, and we fully expect God to do great things! The pastoral staff and elders do not want any of you to miss out on any of it, that's why we need to "clear the deck" in our hearts. We need a heart check. We need to get rid of the junk, any hurt or unforgiveness or bitterness. You miss out on God's blessing if your heart is full of junk, so here's what we're going to do!

Turn your palms up, symbolizing you are willing to release any wounds you are carrying... anything you may be aware or unaware of. You need to forgive, because Jesus commands it of us. Also for those who are aware of having hurt someone by a careless word or unkind deed, give them a moment to receive forgiveness for that. You may need to go and make a phone call or meet someone in person to ask for their forgiveness.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come and heal any intentional or unintentional word or deed by someone in the church.

And there are others of you sitting here this morning who are not in a LifeGroup or are not using your gifts in ministry at Church. And here is the simple prayer I want to pray for you:

Prayer: Lord, will you show my brother or sister that the Church is worth their full commitment, that the Church is worth being totally sold out for... that it is so much richer, deeper, more glorious than anything the world has to offer!! Show them Lord that the Church is worthy of their full investment. Father, in your love and grace, will you reveal this to every man, woman and child sitting here today.

Thank you Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.