

The Church - by Keith Kelly

“The Church is not a building, the Church is not a steeple, the Church is not a resting place, the Church is a people.” Every Sunday, we come to church, the building, either in person or virtually nowadays. We put a lot of emphasis on the church being where we come to worship God. Much like the Jewish people in ancient times. They would go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices and to worship God. They could not offer their sacrifices anywhere else.

The Temple in Jerusalem was built as a house for God. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the innermost part of the Temple, the Most Holy Place, and the priests withdrew, we can read in 1 Kings 8:10-11 to see what happened next:

When the Priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled His temple.

God came down to inhabit the temple built for Him. The only people allowed into the Most Holy Place were priests. If anyone else went in, they would die from being in the presence of God. We can see an example of this when King David was having the ark moved from one location to another. In 1 Chronicles 13:9-10 we read;

When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah and He struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God.

Numbers chapter 4 is where we see this command. God had selected the Kohathites, a Levite clan. They had been selected to be the ones to carry the Ark of the Covenant and other articles from the Tent of Meeting when the Israelites broke camp. Verse 15 is very clear as to what will happen:

After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come and to do the carrying. But they must not touch the things or they will die.

So it was very clear. Only those selected by God could enter the Most Holy Place and handle the holy articles.

Now Jesus changed all that. We know from history, that the Temple was destroyed not too long after Jesus was crucified on the cross. But at the time of His death, something incredible happened. Luke 23:45 tells us what happened;

And the curtain in the temple was torn in two.

The curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple was torn. The division between us and God was removed. Jesus told us this would happen when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well. In John 4:21 Jesus said;

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."

The apostle Paul clarifies this for us in 2 Corinthians 6:16;

For we are the temple of the living God.

And in Ephesians 2:20-22;

... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together, and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together, to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

As the Israelites could only go to the Temple to worship God, many today feel that the church building is the place to come and worship God. There are many magnificent cathedrals and churches that have been built around the world. The architecture is quite impressive, all in an effort to honour God. But the church is a building built by human hands. How can we contain God in such a small building? Look up at the sky, stand on a mountain, fly in a plane, and see what God has created. God is everywhere. So we can worship Him anywhere. I know, that people form an emotional attachment to the building, among other things. Maybe it is where you were married, had your children baptized, or where you have been attending church with your parents since you were young. We do not need to attach ourselves to a building. We can worship God anywhere. For example, the outdoor service we try and hold every year. Jesus did not tell us to

worship God in one location. We are to worship God anywhere. We need to try and avoid emotional attachments with a building, as we know that eventually everything we see will be destroyed. So here is the point, the Church is a people. We are the church. God resides in us. So the question we must really ask ourselves is how can we be the church?

Studies have shown that there is not a lot of difference between Christians and Non-Christians. People come to church, the building, sing hymns, listen to a sermon and reading from the Bible, and they leave and go about their lives not thinking too much about God until next Sunday. But we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Coming to church, again the building, should be seen more as a recharge. Like charging your phone or tablet, getting ready for the week ahead. Not just coming here because it is a great place to kill an hour. We come here to be with fellow believers. To take joy in worshiping God together. When we walk out at the end of the service, that is when we need to be the Church. So how can we be the church?

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (*Read now*)

So what is Paul telling us here? We are all part of the Church, the body of Christ. Each part of the body has a role to play. We can see that in our congregation by the various roles played by other people. We have a minister, some people are on session or committees, and others are good at organizing fundraising and so on. Some people do things that aren't seen by everyone else, but they are still doing something. Remember, we don't do it for earthly reward, but for our heavenly reward, eternal life with Jesus.

Paul helps us out when it comes to being the Church when we leave here. 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, 13 (*Read now*).

We need to show love. Not just to each other but to the whole world. If we can do that and live it, people will see a difference between us as followers of Jesus and the rest of the world. Now, this may mean having to bite your tongue at times. Like when you get cut-off in traffic, or have someone riding your bumper, or when someone steals your parking spot at Costco.

Some people are the Church when they work in the soup kitchen, the food bank, the MCC, the Rest a Bit shelter. Others work at shelters, and go around the city

helping the homeless, and others pack their bags and go on missionary trips. Others work for organizations such as Presbyterian World Service and Development, Ratnak International, or Voice of the Martyrs, or even contributing financially to the Church and other organizations, to allow them to do the work. We can even offer to pray for a neighbor when we see they are going through a hard time. There are many ways to be the Church. What way can each of us be the Church? Start with prayer. Ask Jesus what path He wants you to take. Trust the Lord and go. He will make a way for you to succeed. Sometimes it will be easier than others, but Jesus will be right there with you. He warned us that life wouldn't be easy. The challenging times are when God is growing our faith. Remember what it says in Psalm 23:4;

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.

Just start walking and let Jesus guide you.

One more thing to keep in mind; Jesus did not set a retirement date for us. We need to keep being the Church until He calls us home. What we do may change, but we always need to be the Church.