**What Is the Church?**

**The Word**

Read together 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

**The Big Idea**

The church represents both a beautiful identity and a broken reality. Only by accepting both of those can we faithfully engage the local church and find meaningful fulfilment within it.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. As you consider the four biblical images of the church, which one impacts you most and why?

2. There are many challenges that people have with the church these days. What have been the most challenging aspects of the church for you (this could be Grace specifically or the church in general)? How do you feel about how you’ve navigated those challenges?

3. Consider the comment made on Sunday: we are called to **love** the church and **trust** in God. What was meant by that, and do you agree with that?

4. Consider the idea of pursuing covenant community vs. loose networks. As you consider that distinction, is there any specific way you are feeling called to lean in to the church community a little more these days?

**Sermon Outline**

I. The church in America finds itself in an interesting time

A. “I love Jesus but I hate the church.”

B. Part of this is the church’s fault

1. Scandals in church leadership

2. Church hurt that has made church an unsafe place for some

C. Part of this is the culture’s fault

1. Individualism and consumerism

2. Digital technology

D. We need a vision of church that is both compelling and realistic.

II. The beautiful identity of the church

A. The bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27)

B. The temple of God’s Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22)

C. The flock under God’s care (1 Peter 5:1-4)

D. The body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

E. Living in these identities

1. These identities are ours not by future of what we’ve done, but by virtue of what God has done and how he sees us

2. Christian fellowship is not an ideal we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. - Bonhoeffer

III. The broken reality of the church

A. The bride has lost her first love and gone after other lovers such wealth and worldly treasures (Revelation 3:17-20)

B. The temple of the Holy Spirit has not maintained its holiness but has become corrupted with sins such as sexual sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

C. The flock of God has listened to the voices of other shepherds (Galatians 1:6-7)

D. The body of Christ has divisions and conflicts from within (1 Corinthians 3:3-4, 6:5-6, 11:20-21)

F. Coming to terms with this broken reality

1. Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.

- Bonhoeffer

2. We are called to love the church but to trust in God alone

IV. How will we respond to the beautiful and broken reality that is the church?

A. Will we choose loose networks or covenant community?

1. Loose networks allow us to keep a safe distance and maintain maximum flexibility and freedom

2. Covenant community requires commitment and responsibility but it leads to truly being known and finding our calling within long-term relationships.

B. "Sanctification is hidden in offensively ordinary tasks" - Gustaf Wingren

1. Sanctification is hidden in the offensively ordinary context of a local church

2. It’s the very mundane activities of gathering, teaching, singing, praying, breaking bread, being in small groups, serving, bearing each other’s burdens that true sanctification is found.