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Apostle's Creed Series

I Believe in the Church...and the Communion of Saints
1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

19 If all were a single member, where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;

24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,

25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Today we *continue our Apostle's Creed series*. Last week we examined the phrase I believe in the Holy Ghost...this week we continue with

The holy, catholic church, the communion of saints.

So what does the ***holy, catholic church*** mean?

A lot of you have asked why these are the terms used to describe the church, especially that word ***catholic***.

But first let's talk about ***holy***.

What does it mean ***to you*** for something to be holy?

The word holy does not mean perfect.

It does not mean better than other people.

The word holy means ***dedicated to God, set apart for God, sacred***.

Have you ever been in the presence of ***holiness***?

The Apostle's Creed refers to a whole group of people—the body of Christ, the church.

When have you seen ***the holiness of the church***?

I see it whenever I go visit someone, and find out that a whole bunch of you have been sending cards, food, and phone calls to them—and they tell me how much it has helped them.

The church coming together to help one another—that's ***holy***.

That's being ***dedicated to God!***

I experience that holiness when we have music at the beginning of our service that opens our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and then we stop what we're doing and watch the light of Christ coming into this worship space.

That is ***sacred. Holy***.

What about you? When have ***you experienced*** the holiness of the church?

The second word in our Apostle's Creed phrase this week has really piqued the interest of many in our church.

It's the word ***catholic***, with a lowercase 'c'.

When we hear the word catholic we think of the Roman Catholic church—a denomination and tradition within the larger church.

But the word catholic actually means **universal, wide, broad, all-encompassing**.

It's used in the Apostle's Creed as an **adjective** for the church, and it means the whole universal church.

When we say **holy, catholic church** we are talking about the church that Jesus prayed for in John 17:20-21, when he prayed to the Father for all believers to be unified.

Jesus said, **20** *"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,*
21 *that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

The holy, catholic church refers to **one body** of believers.

Listen to 1 Peter 2:9: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

The church is holy because we are **dedicated to God**.

In Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus says we show this by shining our light: *You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.*

15 *No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Let's put the whole phrase together: **the holy, catholic CHURCH**.

Do you know what the word **church** means?

It's like the old saying goes—

church is not a building, it's the people, a group of believers.

In the Bible the word church is **ekklesia** in Greek, which means **called out**.

In his book **Creed**, Adam Hamilton says the church

is like a non-biological family, or a tribe.

The holy catholic church is something bigger than any one of us—it's like "God's team" of believers.

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 50.

How do you describe **church**?

A lot of people have **problems** with church.
 You probably know people who think church is **not necessary**,
 or that it is just a bunch of hypocrites.
 We've all heard people say they are spiritual, but not church goers, right?
 It's a growing segment of the population.

The problem is, church is **not an optional part** of Christianity.
 It is the bedrock of it.
 Jesus' own body on earth, the body of Christ, is known as the church—
 believers who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The church is the only place where we as Christians **truly learn** how to be in
 relationship with one another, and with God.
 It's where we learn about our **Trinitarian God**,
 who IS relationship and community.
 It is in the church that we have fellowship, encouragement, and a place where
 we hold each other accountable to the faith.

Of course, no church is perfect.

We are part of the church and we are imperfect—so it stands to reason that
 our church would be imperfect too!
 Every church has its dysfunction, it's failures.
 Some are more dysfunctional than others.

But a **healthy church**—and I consider us to be one—

A healthy church is where we find a family of faith
 who will welcome us, encourage us, and accept us, as we seek to follow Jesus
 together.

A healthy church is a support system, a place of encouragement and hope.

Hamilton refers to the church not as a country club, but as a **hospital!**

He says that we are not just members, we are '**stretcher-bearers**'—remember
 the four friends who lowered their paralyzed buddy down on a stretcher to be
 healed by Jesus? Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 108, 114.

That's the church!

The church is also where we **cheer each other on!**

Hamilton tells the story of a church where people coming out of addiction
 were baptized, as the rest of the church cheered!

I think of ***us cheering*** when we share our talents at the talent show,
 or the kids share a skit or musical offering in worship,
 or we recognize new members or graduates,
 new parents or grandparents,
 or people who have received answered prayers!

We also cheer each other on because each and every one of us
 is an ***important part*** of the body of Christ!
 We are each an ***essential body part*** of the whole---our gifts and talents are
 needed in this family of faith!

What ***gifts and talents*** do you bring to the church?
 Doesn't it bring you joy to share what you know, and who you are?

Some people might say, well ***church is not a great place to me!***
 To that, Hamilton would say, well, ***what are you doing to make it any better?***
 That's a great point.

I have a pastor friend who always says to his parishioners,
 If you have a complaint about the church to share with me,
 I also expect you to tell me ***how you are going to help change it!***

What if we all had that attitude,
 when something doesn't go our way in the church?
 That is definitely having the ***same mind and attitude of Jesus Christ!***

A ***healthy church*** is a beacon of ***light*** in a world full of darkness.
 It is ***hope*** in a world full of pain and suffering.
Who here has experienced the goodness and power of the church?
How have you felt the ***power*** of the church?

You know, when we talk about ***sharing the good news***,
 When we talk about that term evangelism,
 Some of what needs to be shared from each one of us to people outside these
 doors, is what we just said—the ***hope and encouragement of the church!***

When was the last time ***you told someone*** about the goodness of God,
 and the encouragement of the church?
 When was the last time you ***invited someone*** to join you at church—a

n event, or class, or worship?

That's the way the church really grows!

We can advertise all day long, I can call on visitors and tell people in the community about our church—but it is the *invitation of members* that really makes all the difference in people joining a church!

Even though most of us would say the church is essential, there are still many in our world who say that church is simply not a necessary part of faith.

When people *say they don't need church*,

Pastor Adam Hamilton has this response:

“Really? You don't need encouragement from others, the blessings of worship and the Eucharist, a message from Scripture, or a congregation that, like a family, stands together and has a greater impact on the world as a group than they could alone?”

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 116.

I couldn't agree more!

What do people do if they don't have a church?

What do they do when they suffer a loss? Or want to share a joy?

Or have a talent to share?

Church is a gift in so many ways, isn't it?

And it's our job to share that gift!

The Apostle's Creed continues with the words: *the communion of saints*.

What does that mean to you?

Let's start with the first part.

What about the word *communion*?

The word means sharing of ideas, or fellowship.

In the Bible the Greek word for communion is *koinonia*.

It's used to refer to the fellowship of believers in the church.

Sometimes communion refers to the *meal* we know as *the Lord's Supper*—but the meal is also about fellowship,

because when we celebrate that meal we remember that everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and Savior shares in the same meal. It is a communion of hearts with Christ, and of our lives with all other Christians.

What about the *communion of saints*?

What is a *saint*?

The English word means someone *who has holiness or a likeness to God*.

In the Bible, the Greek word for saint is *hagios*—

which means *belonging to God*,

and it occurs 235 times in the New Testament.

For Christians, *'the saints'* are all the believers who have gone before us, and all the believers around us.

Hebrews 12:1 describes this *cloud of witnesses* around us as we run the race of faith...those are the saints.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

But sometimes when we say *saint* today, it's like that word *catholic*.

We might mean someone like St. Mother Teresa, or St. Francis—

someone who has been recognized as a saint,

according to the Roman Catholic church.

Someone who has performed miracles.

But saints are just people of faith. Ordinary people.

Adam Hamilton has a great *definition of saint*, in his book *Creed*:

He says that saints are ordinary people who think less of themselves, and more of others. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 123.

Don't you like that?

We sometimes refer to people that way, don't we?

Sometimes we say, oh, she is such a saint!

Saints are people like us, when we are able to step outside ourselves, and follow Paul's words to us in Philippians 2.

There he encouraged us to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, to empty and humble ourselves.

The Bible talks about *us becoming saints*---
being transformed into the people God wants us to be.

The church calls this process *sanctification*.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says that we are *all being transformed* by the Holy Spirit. *And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

I believe in the *holy catholic church, and the communion of saints*.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel!*

We have been given a great gift in the holy catholic church,
The place where we have an essential part to play
according to 1 Corinthians 12.

We are *holy*—dedicated to God.

We are *catholic*—one universal family of faith.

We are in *communion*, fellowship with all believers,

And we are *surrounded by the saints*, who have gone before, and who are all
around us!

I don't know about you, but that sounds like a *wonderful statement of faith*,
don't you think?

Can I get an Amen?

Amen!