

Two or Three and Me!

Hespeler, October 5, 2025 © Scott McAndless – World Communion Sunday
Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4, Psalm 37:1-9, [Matthew 18:15-20](#), Luke 24:13-35

How many times, do you suppose, does the word *church* appear in the Gospels of the New Testament? It is an interesting question because we often assume that the only reason Jesus came was to establish a new religion, and, specifically, to establish the church. So, you might think that he would have talked about the church all the time.

Jesus Didn't Talk Church

But he didn't. In fact, the word church does not appear at all in three of our four gospels. It only appears three times in the Gospel of Matthew, and two of those occurrences are found in our reading this morning. In addition to those two usages, Jesus also speaks about building his church on the rock of Peter's confession in the sixteenth chapter.

But that is it. Those are the only three times when the word church appears on the lips of Jesus during his life. And really, that is not all that surprising when you think about it. The church didn't exist during Jesus' life. He was constantly announcing the kingdom of God, not the establishment of some church institution.

Rethinking What Jesus Had Said

But after his death and resurrection, his followers wanted to remain faithful to his message. Some way of organizing themselves was necessary, and the church came into being – birthed, we are told, by the action of the Holy Spirit.

But of course, the early Christians looked back on the sayings of Jesus to guide them as they tried to set up an organization that was faithful to his teachings. And what little the gospel says about the church are likely words of Jesus that had more general application that the gospel writer took and applied directly to his experience within the church.

Experiencing the Risen Jesus

A key concern for those early Christians was the question of where and how they would experience the presence of the risen Jesus in their shared life within the church. I believe that is still one of our key concerns. And so let's ask what these sayings of Jesus tell us about that vital experience for the church today.

Today, when we imagine what the church should be and how it should properly live out the vision of Jesus Christ, what are the things that we



focus on? We often focus, don't we, on large assemblies of people? We focus on things like power and influence.

Finding Jesus in Big Gatherings

When we think about experiencing the presence of Jesus in the life of the church, we often imagine that happening in our experience of large-scale worship, like when large congregations lift their voices in harmonious song or when we are held spellbound together by the words of a skilled preacher.

It is very similar, isn't it, to the experiences that we have in the world outside the church. Who among us hasn't gone to a concert, a sports game or a political rally and just got completely caught up in the spirit of the crowd? When people start chanting, singing or cheering as one, there is a kind of ecstasy to it. It takes you out of yourself.

We can have the same sort of experience in the church, especially in the larger gatherings. That is why we often even assume that a certain scale is necessary for us to experience God. Jesus seems to be more present in large and busy churches.

And I completely understand where all of that is coming from. I, too, have had that experience of finding myself in the direct presence of my God in the midst of corporate worship. I, too, have seen how we have encountered Jesus in our community when we have the resources that allow us to offer food and clothing to those who don't have enough.

They Don't Talk About Large Gatherings

But when the early church spoke about encountering Jesus in the church, they didn't talk about any of those things. Oh, they knew that he was present when they met, but they also knew that that didn't depend on there being a large group.

In fact, the only thing they remembered Jesus specifically saying about finding him in the life of the church was this: **"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."** So, let's talk about that for a minute. Let's talk about how we encounter the risen Jesus and the power of God among us in small gatherings.

Big Groups and Small Groups

It is not the same thing. Meeting with a few people does not have that same power to sweep you up in the feelings of a crowd. There is no mass hysteria or enthusiasm. But you can encounter Jesus in such gatherings and, I would argue, such encounters have much more power to transform you.

Getting caught up in the spirit of a large group often involves setting yourself aside, if only for a while. When you are chanting or singing at a big event, you tend to forget about the little worries and cares that are with you all the rest of the time. There is a kind of anonymity to being in a large crowd that can make it easy to pretend to be someone else.

That can be a liberating experience, of course, and I do think that it is an experience that we need from time to time. But once the big event is over, you also know that all of those things that make up your personal day-to-day life are still there waiting for you.

A Place to Be Yourself

But small groups are different. They can offer you the chance to be authentically yourself in them. Now, that is not necessarily something that happens quickly or easily. When you first gather with a group of two or three or four people, you may not know them. You don't know if you can trust them enough to talk to them about your worries, fears or anxieties. What if they don't understand you or are impatient with your flaws? You also may not feel like you can share your passions, stories or accomplishments because what if they belittle them?

But when you put in the time and energy to really get to know people – something that is so much harder in a large group or assembly – something amazing can happen. You discover that you can trust people with the things in your life. You discover that they don't laugh at your failures or shame you for your mistakes. You experience them taking joy in your successes. And so, you learn that you can truly be yourself with this small group of people.

A Difficult Path

I don't mean to suggest that this comes easily because it often doesn't. There are so many things that hold us back and make us fearful of the judgement of others. And there are problems and roadblocks that arise as we try to get there.

We see that very thing in our reading, don't we? Before it affirms that Jesus is present in our small groups, it does talk about how our fellow believers may sin against us. It is not always intentional, of course, but we do sometimes say or do things that hurt each other. And there is always a risk of that kind of thing when we drop our defences and start to really get to know one another.

And our reflex, for many of us, when that does happen, is to protect ourselves from further harm. We withdraw or hide ourselves. For others, their reflex is to hit back and spread the harm around. Both reactions prevent our personal growth.

Engaging in Loving Ways

But Jesus urges us to give in to neither of those reflexes. Rather we should engage in loving and respectful ways. There is a lot of good advice about how to do that. You start off privately in a one-on-one setting, and you include others when that is unsafe or unhelpful. You only bring it to the whole church if it can't be worked out otherwise.

But the bottom line is that you don't give up. You work as hard as you can to get to the place where you can truly trust one another enough to be yourselves with each other.

A Level of Commitment

Now, I realize that that sounds like a lot of work. And it can be. Let me underline that it usually isn't. God often blesses us with a group of people that we connect to quickly and learn to trust painlessly. But whether it is easy or it is hard, Jesus is asking us to approach with the same level of commitment to making those relationships work.

But he does not ask you to do that without making a promise. **“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”** That is a promise that, as you learn to trust one

another in your small group, as you feel comfortable sharing more and more of yourself, you will begin to experience more than just mutual friendship, love and support.

I mean, you will experience those things, and they are truly wonderful. Too many people go through their entire lives without them. But Jesus promises even more. He promises that, if you do this in his name, you will also experience his presence in your small group.

Happens in Many Ways

This can happen in a multitude of ways. As you get to know your fellow believers and they get to know you, there will be times when Jesus speaks to you through them. There will also be times when you see the love and power of Jesus in their actions and kindnesses.

But more than anything, you will be built up into a mature Christian. By being honest with others, you will come to know yourself better. You will be affirmed and built up, and become more aware of what you need to work on for yourself.

All of this will build your faith and form you more into the image of Jesus Christ. Christ will be more present and powerful in your life. That is not just a prediction. That is not what I hope will happen for you. That is Jesus' promise to you.

Small Group Sunday

That is why Joni and others have put so much energy into creating this Small Group Sunday for us all. We believe that, as we find more and more ways to connect with each other in small group contexts, we will find the presence and power of Jesus compelling us towards a strong and mature faith that will transform us, that will transform the church and will help to transform the world.

With all of that being said, I would encourage you to consider carefully where that might fit into your life. Not every group is for everybody. It is always easier to connect with people when we share the same passions, and there are particular groups that will help us to do that. I also know that we all have a great many demands upon our time, and we have to choose where to make our commitments and what fits into our lives.

Why We Do This

Small groups are vital to the life of the church in many ways. They are what enable us to do much of our work, including our vital outreach, but also simple things like keeping our facilities clean and in good shape. Some are essential to our organization and mission, while others are focussed primarily on fellowship or learning. All are needed in our shared life in the church.

But I want to make clear that I am not encouraging you to do this because we need your labour. I'm not asking you to do this for the sake of the church. I am asking you because it is the best way that I know to accelerate your growth as a Christian. It is one of the very best ways for you to encounter Jesus in your life.