

## We're Meeting in Lot A

Acts 2:42-47

January 5 and 12, 2020

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Let us pray:

How good it is to sing our praises to you, our God. You have done great things for your people; you heal the brokenhearted and heal our wounds. You determined the number of stars in the sky and call each of them by name. Why shouldn't we call upon your name and call you great. You are the Lord, you are mighty in power and your understanding has no limit. You stain those who are humble and cast out the wicked. We are grateful for you, O Lord. As we come today, help us to hear your word spoken to us. Open us to your ever-widening Spirit in this place and may we be changed through it. We ask this through your spirit and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen (Psalm 147 paraphrased)

Ask anyone in our fellowship why they go to church, and the answers will be as varied as the day is long. Ask a teenager and you might hear an answer associated with a compulsory act of will imposed upon them by their parents. Some might tell you that it is a very reason for their existence.

Question someone who has been a part of a church for their entire life and they may also tell you that it has always been a part of who they are. It is part of the family, part of the family system, part of their heritage. The name of the church is synonymous with their last name. Some of you might fit that answer pretty well.

Ask someone who has come into relationship and into faith later in life and they will tell you something entirely different than someone who was part of a cradle roll at a local church. Why do you go to church – be ready for answers that may be similar but also have their own story.

But if we were to pose the question of why the church exists, we would also come up with some different answers. Some of them would border on the realm of heresy – but I also think that many people would have it well thought out and centered on who they are and the connection that they have with a church.

In my previous position in the conference, we would often go into local churches to provide consultation on a number of issues. Sometimes it was merely about a church coming to understand a new calling in their lives. Sometimes it was to provide some support to new initiatives, sometimes for stewardship. Sometimes we visited some thriving churches, but often times we were visiting churches that were falling on hard times.

Three questions that I would frequently ask are: 1. Why do people need Jesus? 2. Why do people need the church? And 3. Why do people need this church?

Regardless of what we were called to do in our time with a local church, asking questions of “why” was very important as we got to the heart of churches existence.

Throughout January in our sermon series we are exploring those themes, and more specifically the questions that exist and linger on our hearts about the church and why it is so important to our lives. Coming into relationship with Jesus is an essential part of why it is that the church exists and ultimately the centering point for who we are in our community.

In the end, we can say with conviction – this is who we are! This is who we are called to be!

When we bring people into relationship in the church, we will often read words that express the heart of the why. As an extension of our Baptismal Covenant and our desire to connect with those that join our fellowship, we will read:

**The church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time for the conduct of worship and the due administration of God’s Word and Sacrament, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world. All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies.**

That statement is at the heart of who we are and why it is that we exist as a church. We come together for worship, to experience the mystery of God’s love and grace in outward and visible signs. But more than that – we come together united in the

Spirit of God to be in fellowship with one another and to find discipline in a life that can seem unruly and out of control – to find balance and to be foundationally grounded in a hope for our future in Jesus Christ.

If we were to start a foundational study on the church, most of that scholarship would begin with the church in the Acts of the Apostles. In Pentecost – the Holy Spirit came into the foundations of the church and we begin our journey. It was Christ prior to his departure from his disciples that promised that his Spirit would come and teach them everything and remind them of all that he had said and done.

And so it is that the church, the foundations of who we are today, are built upon the Rock. Ephesians 2:19-22 reads, “**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 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.”**

The church, Christ’s Body, is built on the foundations of the apostles and the prophets. And it is that reminder that Christ appointed Peter, Cephas, and told him that he would be the very foundation upon which the church would be built.

This morning, we heard the message from the Book of Acts about the foundations of what we call the church on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had indeed come and descended upon those who were gathered. It was the day to fulfill the promises of God and in so gathering together – the Apostles were fulfilling the promises of Christ that promised that his body, his church, would gather and be built on the foundations.

In writing the account of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke wanted to show how God through the Spirit was penetrating the world in ever widening circles. It was a continuation of what Jesus was able to do in and through the Apostles. Moreover, it was a story about what could happen when we rely on that Holy Spirit in our lives.

And so, it is that those who gathered in that ever widening circle found themselves changed. “**They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.” (Act 2:42)**

More than any other place in scripture, scholars point to this as the very point that the church began and moreover, why it is that it exists. In six very simple verses, it

describes who we are, why it is that we exist and what it is that we should be about.

Fellowship was a foundation of who they were and how they were united in that Spirit of God that was moving in and through them. Corporate fellowship of believers in Christ was an element of worship, of a life of devotion and learning, allowing the worship of God to change life from within and breaking bread with others who also found their identity in Christ.

But fellowship also has other purposes. It is about nurturing and building community and creating normative matters of faith. Because the apostles were successors of all that Christ was doing in the world, it was incumbent upon the apostle to pass on what they had learned. They were successors to Jesus and, therefore, who we also receive a Spiritual inheritance in and through that succession as heirs of Christ himself.

Paul often referred to the life in the Spirit and how it is that the Spirit moved in our lives. In his letter to the people of Rome, he writes, “**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.**” **Romans 8:16-17**

In the fellowship of believers, the church is about sharing and growing in our relationship with Christ. The church is about building faith, passing on what we have learned, and bringing others into a relationship with Christ.

Paul also writes to the church in emphasis about that Spirit and that faith in Christ. “**there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all**”. **Eph 4:4-6**

I find it amazing what the Holy Spirit is capable of doing when we trust in that spirit. Just last week in one of our devotionals as a worship staff, Pastor David read out of Sarah Young’s book entitled, “Jesus Calling; enjoying peace in his presence.” The devotion for the day began by saying, “Trust me with every fiber of your being! What I can accomplish in and through you is proportional to how much you depend on me.”

She continued to describe the circumstances by which we trust in God and how much we rely on his presence in our lives. It was a reminder that God through the Holy Spirit cares deeply about the simple portions of our lives as much as those dramatic leaps of faith.

When we were sitting there – I was thinking about my experiences in Camping and the times that I've been rock climbing and repelling. When you rock climb, or shall I say, when amateurs rock climb – they use climbing gear that includes ropes and harnesses, carabiners, belaying devices, special shoes and even chalk.

Rock climbing in my experience isn't something that you can do without some instruction and introduction. I wouldn't have had the faintest idea of how to put on a harness or even how to begin to climb a rock face had it not been for those who came before me – teaching me, instructing me, and encouraging me. Those that taught me were taught by someone else – it was as if I was inheriting information from those that came before me.

But even more than that – there is this element of climbing. If you trust in your equipment and trust in those that are there around you to keep you safe – you will climb. You may not have a flawless climb, but you will climb.

But if you don't trust in the equipment and don't trust in those that are there to help you along the way – you won't even be able to take the first step.

What you can accomplish is directly proportional on how much you depend on your equipment.

Bringing people into fellowship and into trust of the Holy Spirit and faith in Jesus Christ is why we exist. We bring people into relationship, we invite people into the fellowship.

When we rely on the Holy Spirit and devote ourselves to the Word of God and to fellowship, magnificent things can happen. Others come to rely on that same Spirit, their lives are changed. It isn't about what you and I do – but it's about what the Holy Spirit can do in and through us.

And that leads me to another reason that the church exists. And that is to bring others into relationship and trust in the one who has changed us.

I recently read an article about reasons that people come to church. Among many reasons why, it gave three very simple reasons and ones that each of us can learn from.

### **Three Reasons People Visit a Church for the first time.**

**Something is missing.** There are times in our lives when we realize that there is something that is missing in our lives. We journey through life, hearing that still small voice in the echoes of our imagination and the Holy Spirit – through no

power of our own – reveals to us that something is missing in our lives. We have stuff, but there is something missing. There is an emptiness, a longing.

**Something is broken.** We don't have to journey very far into the new year with our longings for something to be new in a new decade to realize that we live in a fallen and broken world. We live in a world of brokenness. People each and every day find themselves walking alone in their brokenness and seek desperately to know that there is something different. God has a power to restore our brokenness and bring healing and wholeness in our lives.

And the final, but certainly not the last reason that people come to church is because **something is new** in their life. New marriage, new baby, new job, New Year. It's in these new places that people become receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit.

But guess what – sometimes the work of the Holy Spirit is at work in you. Did you know that 86% of people come to church for the very first time through a personal invitation of someone they know? Yes people drive by the church, yes people see advertisements, yes people use the internet – but 86% of all people coming to a church for the very first time come through a personal invitation.

Over the past few weeks, I imagine that many of you had an opportunity to spend time with family watching movies, binging series on Netflix and even attending a sporting event. It's almost a natural next move for us to talk about those series, to talk about the game, and to ask someone if they've seen the latest film.

A natural conversation ensues. You want them to be a part of something of which you are a part. It's so easy to invite someone to something you are a part of – we do it every day. We do it every time we invite someone to a tailgate party in Lot A.

I love the church, I love this church. And it only seems like a natural next step to invite them into something special right here at Ingomar Church.

I think I'll do that this week. I hope you will do the same, though the power of the Holy Spirit.