

**“Gathered and Scattered”
Mark 3:13 – 19**

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”

As I was preparing for today I came to the realisation that I have been a follower of Jesus for 33 years, from a completely non-church, non-Christian home. It was surprised it was that long... it kind of made me feel a bit old...

With that was there has always been one constant: the church. After becoming a follower of Jesus I had another conversion experience. Following Jesus had to be more than me and Jesus, Jesus and me. As I read the Bible I began to see that the Jesus was someone who gave his life away for others and the first followers did the same. And that this book was written not to individuals but to groups of people. I had to say to myself, “It’s not all about me”. I was converted to this community called the church.

The Church – the Church that stretches across the globe and into eternity, and the local church like this one.

“How would you explain the church to someone who has no knowledge of Christianity?”

I was converted not simply by my experience - even though my personal experience by and large was good – but by what Scripture teaches.

Most of the New Testament is about the work of the church that Jesus initiated and ordained.

The church was not a human invention.

It is not just another human organisation.
It is God's idea.

It is what we see Jesus doing again and again.
We see it this passage this morning.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

Jesus gathers people to himself.

The church is the gathered people of God.

Now we could discuss the form or the shape the church takes.

Yet there is this sense there is a time and place this community gathers for public worship of God, to be taught and to receive the sacraments of baptism and communion.

It is a place where Christians gather to receive mutual encouragement and prayer. We gather to meet God as we glorify Him.

It's in the church do discover what it means to be Christians.

Christian author Mark Galli wrote:

"If you want to do something that is really hard, and you want to push yourself to the limits, if you want to be constantly tested in love, if you want to live into your ultimate destiny – if you want to learn to be holy and blameless in love before God – there is no better place to do that than in the local church."¹

But even more than that, if you're a Christian, church is not something you go to. It's something you are.

You *are* the church.

Whenever we gather it with friends for lunch or dinner or at youth group or exercise group or in a house group... we are the church.

We cannot ignore though that to be a follower of Jesus is to walk alongside other followers of Jesus.

¹ Mark Galli, *When Did We Start Forgetting God*, 81.

When I think about this I imagine the story of Mike and Martin.

Mike and Martin strike up a conversation at a BBQ.
And being good, keen Kiwi blokes, the conversation soon turns to rugby.
Mike soon discovers that Martin plays rugby.
So of course Mike's really interested, so he says, "I used play a bit of rugby;
I played prop. What position do you play?"
Martin replies, "On the wing."
Mike goes on, "Oh yeah. I used to play for a club down in the Waikato. Who
do you play for?"
Martin says, "No particular club."
So Mike pauses for a moment: "Oh, so it's kind of a social team?"
Martin, "No I'm not really part of a team."
At this point Mike kind of looks at his beer, looks back at Martin and looks
at his beer again.
It's only his first one, he's hasn't even opened it and it's ginger beer.
There's something not right with this picture.

You know, 30 years ago it was assumed that to be a Christian was to belong to a church.

But not today.

People today assume that they can follow Jesus without walking alongside other followers of Jesus.

When Jesus called people to himself he to them, "You've got to join the movement."

You gotta join the movement.

You gotta join up with God's people in a community of faith.

He did. He did it all the time.

Initially how many did he call? We read in this passage he called together the twelve plus others.

And in today's passage we read about another... seventy-two.

And then, what's the next big number?

I'll give you a clue, it's in Acts: a group of about one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15).

And then what's the number after that? About three thousand were added to that number (Acts 2:41).

AND then there's another number – five thousand (Acts 4:4)

You know, the Church with a big 'C' is God's movement on the planet, and the church with a little 'c' is the local expression of it.

We gather.

That's what we do – but not everyone's convinced.

Something has happened in recent times and particularly in North America there has been the emergence of the 'nones' and the 'dones'.

"Nones" are those who self-identify as having no religious affiliation. The number has surged in the United States to almost 1 in 3. For us that's the norm. For the United States it has come as shock.

Alongside that is the 'dones' – those who are saying "I like Jesus but I'm *done* with church. I pursue God quite well in the sunsets and on the nature and in the Sunday morning café, thank you very much."

So here's my question this morning,

"Why do becomes 'done' with church?"

Something happens and there is a dis-connect.

Unanswered questions

You know, the church has a bad name for itself in terms of giving glib answers to really important questions.

And here's the thing: unanswered questions, answered badly, can quickly become *unanswerable* questions.

In other words, that's the best answer you've got?

Someone asks a really important pressing question about hell, or suffering, or the Rainbow community or _____ and we reply with a cliché... and they're done.

Conversely,

Theological dissonance

Some so desperately want a theology that doesn't put them so out of step with the wider cultural milieu.

Someone asks a pressing question and is given a Biblical, historic, orthodox, well-reasoned, thoughtful response and they don't like it... and they are done.

Disillusionment

“I thought it was going to be this but it turned out to be this!”
And the post-modern mind distrusts most things organized or institutional.
So if there something organised or smells of being institutional then there
must be something wrong with it.

Relationships

The infighting, the sense of unwelcome, having to be around people who
are simply just not like us, judgmentalism,
Community is messy.
God places you with annoying people – you quite possibly one of those
annoying people.
Or the lack of relationship.

I’ve been there.

I sat through a church split where a congregational meeting was held and
there was and shouting and tears and broken relationships.

I was part of church where the pastor took a timely sabbatical and while he
was away the elders essentially held what could be called mutiny.

I witnessed the painful fall of pastors with great ministries and the hurt and
devastation they caused.

Now I’m watching as Progressive Christianity undermines Biblical Christian
faith in the West. It capitulates to culture in an attempt to placate and be
acceptable to the world. I mean, I look at the values and priorities of
Progressive Christianity and our wider culture and they are the same. And
as I’ve said before the fruit of Progressive Christianity is a powerlessness,
irrelevance and massive terminal decline.

So I’d like to pause this morning.

As I preparing this week I had a sense that there may be some here and you’re
not done, but you’re almost done or you could see yourself being done.

What I felt was that annoyances, the mess, the failures, the people... can all end
up eclipsing Jesus.

If you there may be people who are done with this body called the church, silently
bring them before the Lord

So I liked to pray.

We are gathered and then what Jesus does is he scatters us.
Not in a negative way into all the places and in the sense of all the activities and amongst all the people we meet in any given week.

We are a gathered people in Jesus Name, and we are a scattered people in that same name.

We are sent. You are sent.

As I've mentioned before over one summer as a student I worked as a plain clothes store detective charged with catching unsuspecting shoplifters.

This covered the wider Auckland region.

So one day I might be sent to Orewa; not a bad place to go and quite a nice drive to work.

Another morning I might be sent somewhere in South Auckland which on the other hand had its risks. One supermarket had a reputation – if you caught anyone they would always want to fight you.

And another day I might be sent to Waiheke Island – the best of all. A ferry crossing and thieves was a nicer bunch.

How would work is that every morning I would get a phone call with the instructions for the day.

For that summer I was very much a sent person.

We're sent – we're scattered - with a message.

There is a God who loves and he is the King.

Jesus has to become the primary leader of your whole life.

He needs to be No. 1.

He will now call the shots.

And that's such good news for some people because there are other entities that rule and ruin their lives.

Far from being restricting it's so liberating.

You know for some people it's like their possessions possess them.

Some people have encountered such deep disappointment that it comes out of them in anger and frustration and even rage;

There are some who's mental health is causing such pain and havoc

OR

They live under despair and disappointment.

Yet Jesus, who's the true king, He comes and gives new hope and a new sense of purpose and can give a deep settled peace.

And this God who is a God of love and in Jesus the King we see that love most perfectly expressed.

King Jesus comes as a self-sacrificing servant.

On the Cross He took on himself our sins and bore penalty so we didn't have to.

He died in our place and was laid in tomb.

And then three days later Jesus rose from the dead.

And that means that pardon is available for you and me today.

If you feel dirty, God can make you clean.

If you've wandered away, God will find you and bring you home.

If you've broken his law, God in Jesus will forgive you.

If we feel ashamed, He will restore our dignity.

We may be able to tell part of the Gospel or maybe none of it at all.

What I find interesting is people are genuinely surprised when they meet a real Christian in person, who they like.

Sent people with message regardless of reception

So again, I'd like to pray for all of us.

And as we do, I'd like you to silently bring this week before the Lord, and all the places where you scattered and sent.

Our places of work (not just paid work), our sports, our places of leisure, places of celebration, the school and school gate, the classroom, the café, the home, the lounge,