

## CHURCH:

### INTRO:

Good morning – let me read you a quote by J.F. Powers, from a Novel called “Wheat that Springeth Green.”

*“This is a big old ship, Bill. She creaks, she rocks, she rolls, and at times she makes you want to throw up. But she gets where she’s going. Always has, always will, until the end of time. With or without you. – J.F. Powers, Wheat that Springeth Green*

What a great description of the church.

The church with all its flaws, with all of its imperfect people keeps moving on through out history. The church that has gone through the dark ages, through persecution, through revival, through the enlightenment, and now through post modernism, but the church continues to stay a float. Sometimes we can be so frustrated with it, and other times we could never be prouder.

Listen to how Jim Wallis – Harvard Professor – Political activist – defends the church against former Governor of Minnesota and Ex Professional wrestler Jesse Ventura.

### Read section from God’s Politics: Pages 37-39:

Jesse never replied to that letter.

### PRAY:

Welcome to the Revolution. I know it is homecoming weekend and some of you might not know this but this weekend the Revolution did a handful of events for our alumni, and we have some of them still with us this morning. So welcome to all of you oldtimers.

This semester we are continuing a semester series on our churches core values, and for this week our topic will be the church. The topics we have been tackling have been large topics that you can spend a semester teaching on and we are trying to boil down our core beliefs on them in 40 or so minutes.

So let’s jump into the topic of the church:

### The study of the church:

So what is the church? Within Christianity today there is book after book written about how to do church, what the church is supposed to look like, critiques of the church, many of you are familiar with a whole movement of churches labeled “the emergent church” which that movement has sold book after book on how to do church today in our culture.

The study of the church is called ecclesiology. The word church comes from the Greek word ekklesia – which can be defined as “an assembly” or “called out ones.” When the word church is used in the New Testament it can refer to a couple of things:

#### The local church in scripture:

Often when the word church is used it refers to a group of Christians that meet in a specific town or house.

Here is one example from scripture:

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: - 1 Cor 1:2*

We see Paul using the word church to describe this local congregation in Corinth - Paul does similar things in other letters – see Galatians or Thessalonians for other examples.

So sometimes the word church is used to describe a local congregation.

#### The church universal:

The NT will also use that same term in referring to the Church universal. Church is used to refer to all Christians everywhere, and that is what I mean when I say the Church universal, all of Christians everywhere.

We see certain analogies come out in Scripture when referring to the Church universal.

#### The Church is described as the body of Christ:

One analogy used in describing the Church – is it being called the body of Christ.

Paul describes Jesus and his relationship to the church in his letter to the Ephesians:

*“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” – Ephesians 1:22-23*

We see Paul making similar points in other letters as well, but here is one example. That Jesus is to be head over the church – that he is to be our guide, our leader directing our steps – but we are to be his body.

So what are some things that we can learn from the picture that we are given of the church?

### **Diversity:**

One thing we can learn from this image is to embrace diversity.

This body – the church has looked drastically different over the years. Imagine if we went back in time and looked at the church of the middle ages or if they came to our church today. Without even leaving our time period, but simply traveling over seas – many Christian services would be hardly recognizable for us here in America.

Paul describes this diversity when speaking on the different giftings within the church.

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. – 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27*

Sum up this verse:

Joe Lyway gave us an image at fall retreat to help illustrate this – describe the image.

What I love about the church is I get to be in relationships with all types of people. People that I’d probably never rub shoulders with, or

be friends with I am because of the Church. Even this morning I am sure we have many different interests, but we come together because of our love for Jesus. It is Jesus – the head of the church – that draws together such a diverse body.

Just like our biological families we don’t get to choose who is in it and who is not. If you are familiar with the “National Lampoon Vacation Movies” many of us have cousin Eddies in our family and it is the same way in the church.

### **Show picture of cousin Eddie:**

For better or worse we are one family, one body as a church.

### **The church as an organism:**

Another thing that this analogy as the church being the Body of Christ causes us to picture is the church as a living-breathing organism.

We don’t just go to church, but rather we are the church as an assembly, as a group of called out ones.

We can see from looking at just a little bit of Scripture that when the Bible uses the word church it is not referencing a building, or a location, rather a group of people – a group of “called out people” – In our culture the word church has become synonymous with a building – but it may be more accurate to say, not that I am going to church but I am going to be with the church.

The church is not a stagnant building but a vibrant community, with a pulse, with direction, with a mission, ready to go and serve, and love. The church is able to be mobile like a person, the church can listen, and see, and cry, and rejoice, all of these are attributes that us as humans can relate with.

### **Love:**

Another thing that this analogy of the church being the body of Christ causes us to picture is love.

For the most part we love our own bodies, we take care of our bodies, most of us bathe, we eat, we sleep, we drink, who doesn’t like their own body? Paul says a similar thing when speaking about how husbands and wives are now to have one body in marriage:

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. - **Ephesians 5:28-30**

So if we are members of Christ's body – and no one ever hated his own body – then this analogy communicates that Christ loves the church – he loves the church as himself.

We may be able see this idea of Christ's love for the Church a little clearer with another analogy used in Scripture about the church.

### **The church is seen as the bride of Christ:**

In the OT Israel is given the label as God's bride, and this analogy continues on in the NT, Revelation 19:

*Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." – **Revelation 19:6-8***

Let's unpack this verse to see the beautiful imagery of Christ and the Church:

So John hear this voice and it sounds like great multitudes of people, these verse are actually a hymn, so what John is hearing is a song, sung by many folks, John uses nature to describe this song, and this is not just any song but a song that like the roar of rushing waters are like loud peals of thunder. These phrases point to God's majesty, power, and glory.

This song starts our with a Hallelujah – with instruction to rejoice and join the festivity – for the wedding of the Lamb – which the Lamb in Revelation represents Christ – has come.

Some of you learned this at fall retreat but engagements and betrothals happen differently in different cultures.

There is actually someone here this morning that wants to get engaged...Just kidding, hopefully I made a few girls hearts skip a step here this morning.

The picture we get in the Scriptures is from a Hebrew betrothal, which after a given period is followed by a wedding. This betrothal rite binds the bride to the groom until the wedding banquet comes. In the Hebrew setting there was a waiting period between betrothal and wedding period, while the couple lived separately. During this time the two families arranged the terms of the dowry, which was the payment, which was a sum paid to the bride's family for her hand in marriage. Once this was set up then the wedding feast was finally celebrated, we see this set up described in Scripture. I like the way William Hendriksen puts it:

*In Christ the bride was chosen from eternity. Throughout the entire Old Testament dispensation the wedding was announced. Next, the Son of God assumed our flesh and blood: the betrothal took place. The price- the dowry – was paid on Calvary. And now, after an interval which in the eyes of God is but a little while the Bridegroom returns and "It has come, the wedding of the Lamb." The Church on earth yearns for this moment, so does the Church in heaven."*

What a beautiful image of the church as the bride of Christ. For those of you who are married you know the types of feelings that go on during the wedding day for your spouse. These are some of the most intense emotions that God could use to show his tremendous love the His church! God loves his church!

We see both the analogies of the church as the body of Christ and the Bride of Christ come out in 1 Cor 6:15:

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! – **1 Corinthians 6:15***

### **What is the purpose of the church?**

So now we have some images of the church...but what is the purpose of the church?

Some may see the church as a club, a place where people with similar interests come and assemble for food, fellowship, and fun. Maybe that is what the church has become, but one of the primary goals of the church is to be a group of called out ones who are on a mission!

### **The church is to be a group that is on a mission:**

We have read this verse every single week we have done a message this semester so why should I stop now:

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." - "Matthew 28:18-20*

The church is to go and make disciples – many churches are doing too much staying. In America people aren't busting down our doors trying to come to us, to join our communities, to come to our services, and meetings. Just as Jesus commanded his disciples we must go to them.

This really is a philosophical difference in how to do church. One model is the attractional model – this is where we try and attract people to what we are doing – An example is putting on an outreach service for people to bring their friends to that takes place in a church building – this is when we are inviting people to come to our own turf.

The other model could be called Incarnational – which is when we go and become a part of what others are doing. We go to their turf as a church and we try and bear the image of God in that location.

I like this model – the church is to be a community that reflects the values of God's kingdom – an image bearing society –

What does it mean for the church to be a human society, or an image bearing society – the image idea is about an emperor or a king putting a statue of himself in a country or city so that the people in that city can know who their ruler is. God puts into the Garden human beings so that the rest of the world know God is.

### **Examples of this would be:**

The reason we do church on Ball State's campus we are on college students turf, there is a church in Dublin that bought a pub and there pastors work the bar and listen to the patrons, and share God's love there. A couple of years ago I did a Bible study in one of the local

bars, and one of the bar owners would join us, now I'm not sure how likely it is for him to come to us, but when the church is out where people already are we can have a great impact on them.

So one of the main purposes of the church is to go. To go and take care of orphans, to go and help rebuild communities, to go where people are already hurting – we are to do this not as just individuals, but as communities –

So an application question that I have to ask right now is how can the church – the community you're a part of go out and be the church in places where the church is not?

### **How do we accomplish this purpose?**

#### **Through the local church:**

We accomplish God's mission for the Church universal through the local church. It is through these local communities that God's kingdom will be advancing all through out the world.

Here at the Revolution we believe in the local church! We believe that those who are a part of the Universal church need to find a local body of believers that they can link their lives with. A church where folks can find deep community, where people can find leadership from pastors and elders in their lives, a place for people to worship together, to find belonging, accountability and ultimately a place for us to be on mission together.

#### **The Revolution Core values bookmark:**

Here at the Revolution we have certain core values that help define our local church and we decide to write down some of these core values on a not so little bookmark.

If you were at our fall retreat you would of gotten one of these bookmarks. These have some of our basic core values as a church. The four main areas that we focus on at the Revolution are: Theology: we want to be a community that loves God with our minds, Worship: we want to be a community that is passionate about worshipping and seeking God with all of our lives, Community: we believe that God created us for community and that it is a vibrant role in our lives as

believers, and lastly Mission: we desire to be a church that is on a mission a community that is in sync with God's plan to redeem all things. And I want to say that all four of these core values happen in the context of the local church. Theology, Worship, Community, and Mission all happen in the context of the local church.

After the service we will have some folks by the doors passing out these bookmarks in case you want one and didn't get one at our retreat.

So again there is a little bit about our local church The Revolution and again we believe in the local church, we desire for folks to get involved in the local church, but this does not happen quite as easily as you might think.

### **Consumerism:**

In America we are taught to be wise consumers. When making purchases to weigh all of the options and then make a decision. We have a pastor in this church who does this with cell phone companies, and even though he may make the most informed decision at the time sometimes he may have different needs, or his interests change, or one provider comes out with something new that his old provider doesn't happen, or maybe he simply gets bored which will cause him to join a different provider.

Well that is good and fine with Cell phones, or computers or whatever else we shop around on. But we also do that with the church.

We treat the church as a commodity, as something to be evaluated; we grade the worship, the sermons, the programs, and all other aspects of the church to see how it compares with other similar products. This is unavoidable to some extent, but we often go too far.

There is no perfect church, and if we look at the church as a consumer we will eventually grow dissatisfied when a cooler sexier product opens up next door.

Obviously I would encourage someone when looking for a church not to simply jump into a church since it is the first one they went to, but to look around and see what options are out there.

What is not good, or helpful is staying in this place using the church like a buffet taking a little something from one ministry, a little something from another, let me see I like the Bible Studies that this one group does, but I like the large group meeting that this other group does, and so on.

### **Have Steve Garst share:**

Maybe many of you related with Steve's story. Maybe you're a freshman or a sophomore, and you've come to Ball State looking for a good church, but you didn't just stop with one, you thought I might as well find as many good Christian groups as I can. And what is awesome about that is you can like a buffet line take and give what you think is not appropriate.

### **Some of you may still be saying, why is this a bad idea?**

Well let me tell you: All of these may connect with you, or just a few but it is time for me to get on my soapbox for a second.

### **It reinforces that Christianity is about formal Christian activities:**

Is Christianity about going to a bunch of Christian meetings with a bunch of different people? Is Christianity really about getting involved in a bunch of different Christian groups? I would hope to convince you that the answer is no. Christianity is about living with Jesus as King and one of the best ways to do this is in a community of people that you have linked your lives with.

### **It gives a false sense of what defines our faith.**

Going to a bunch of different groups and meetings gives us a false sense of what defines our faith. Some of us may think I am doing pretty well in my faith because I am going to this or that meeting, but then later reflection shows that our own faith is shallow because we are we are measuring our faith by how many Christian meetings you're going to.

### **It hinders us from being on a mission:**

When we spend all of our time in Christian meetings and going to Christian activities, it then take the place for us as a church to be on a mission together! I remember talking to a girl a handful of years ago

who literally had a Christian meeting with a different group every single night of the week. It was hard for me to hold back and scream NO! This is not what being a follower of Christ is about!

### **Keeps us shallow in relationships.**

Talk about Steve – I remember sitting down with him – Steve is one of my best friends now, and this would not of happened if he continued being involved in multiple different ministries.

Jumping from ministry to ministry brings with it a great breadth but little depth in relationships. We can meet a lot of people but really go deep with just a few.

It is easier to have shallow relationships as well. Being involved in multiple ministries to kind of allows you to treat your community like a buffet as well. Well I like these three folks from that group and these two from that group, but when you are committed to a local church you become committed to people you get a long with and committed to people who are maybe a little weird, or people that rub you the wrong way. This is a lot messier. But having deeper relationships with folks you are naturally drawn to and other folks as well

### **It makes it harder for people who are involved in your life:**

I remember telling Steve if I'm going to be involved in your life, your going to have to pick a ministry. I told him I hope it is us, but for your life and your walk with God, I would rather not have it be us, and be someone else then for you to continue on doing what you're presently doing.

### **We often have less accountability not more:**

Often when there are folks in our church that go to a bunch of different ministries, it is easy as a leader to think, well they are getting this or that input from someone else. Or if you are involved in multiple groups its easy to bail from one if things begin to get too personal, or people start to challenge you in ways that you are not completely comfortable in.

### **Preface:**

Now I know for some of you this is difficult you come here on Sunday

but you really are committed to another group on campus that meets during the week, and I would say that is great.

For others of you maybe it is not quite clear where you're committed to serving at, my challenge is for you to pick a community, to pick a local church, and then link your lives with them.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Let me read you that quote from the beginning of this message again:

***"This is a big old ship, Bill. She creaks, she rocks, she rolls, and at times she makes you want to throw up. But she gets where she's going. Always has, always will, until the end of time. With or without you. – J.F. Powers, *Wheat that Springeth Green****

Jesus says this about the church to his disciple Peter in Matthew 16: "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

The church continues to roll on, sometimes is does things that makes you want to throw up, sometimes it can be a frustrating thing to be involved in, but it is through the church that God is enacting his mission of Redemption to the world.

It is through this beautiful body of Christ, through this wonderful bride, that the walls of injustice are falling. Don't get me wrong the church has done some crazy things, and there have been some folks in the past who did not really belong to God, but did some pretty awful things in the past, but the Universal church across the world has continued on.

And it is through the local church that God wants to impact the world, to impact Muncie, and to impact this campus for His name.

Here at the Revolution we would like to invite you to be participants not spectators in our church. Not folks who are on the sidelines but folks who get in the game. We would love for us to be a community that doesn't just talk about mission, but a community, a church, a group of called out ones - that are on a mission together.