

Real Spirituality Lives in the Church
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“I don’t believe in organized religion.” “Going to church doesn’t make you any more Christian than standing in a garage makes you an automobile.” “I love Jesus, but I don’t love His church.” Maybe you have heard these popular slogans or have believed them. No doubt, such sentiments come from genuine feelings and even reasonable inclinations. Christians have not always represented Jesus the best, sometimes terribly. Whole Church organizations have let their communities and their people down as well. Martin Luther famously said, “Wherever God plants a church, the devil plants a cathedral.” Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God will look messy when He compares it to a field with wheat and weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.” (Matthew 13:24-26)

While the Church rightly takes organizational forms in order to effectively follow Christ’s command to make disciples, the ultimate definition of the church is the congregation of believers. The Church is not the creation of human beings but created and built by Christ, as He declares in Matthew 16. Real spirituality means being a part of Christ’s church. It’s impossible to be a Christian outside of it. You are baptized into it. Jesus’ death and resurrection brought us back to God but also back to community with one another. As the body of Christ, we are the hands and voice of the Lord for the benefit of our neighbors. Through broken people, Jesus makes disciples of broken people.

Yet the Church (you and I) needs the Gospel’s healing power as much as those who have never heard it. The center of the Church is not the pastor, the bureaucracy, the particular constitution, or the organization, but Jesus and His Word and Sacraments. Christians never graduate from needing the Word to call them to repentance and give them forgiveness. Just as Jesus rebuked the Devil saying, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that falls from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

May we always closely orbit around Jesus and His Word, His Supper, and His baptism, for our sake and for the sake of those who need to hear that they are not alone. May we humbly cling to God’s grace as we share it with a hurting world. May we also help change people’s perception of the Church with the way we act and speak.