

How to Love a Church
July 14, 2024
Psalm 24; Eph. 1:3-14
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When thinking about the question “How to love a church” we must begin with, “why we might love a church”? Why do we want to gather in this way, in spaces like these? Why would we want to get up or get online to be together? When there is so much drawing us elsewhere. We could be actively in bed right now. We could be at festivals, hiking in nature or gathering with family and friends. There is so much else we could be doing besides being here. So why do we? Why do we continue to participate in this centuries old tradition? Why do we choose to come here? How does being here help us to love the church?

Maybe you have always been a church goer. From your first breath, you have been carried to this building or buildings like this. There is a part of you that cannot imagine doing anything differently. Maybe you come for the beauty of the stain glass windows. Or you come for the amazing, beautiful music. Or maybe you come because of the people, you come for the love of the people.

I found it wonderful, as I was reflecting on the readings for today, how the psalm was read asks “who shall ascend to the holy mountain of the lord.” And Ephesians, if you don’t know begins by talking about how amazing it is that we who were so different from each other have been invited by God to be brought together, to be part of the body of Christ. Maybe that is why some of us are gathered here today?

If we are going to talk about how to love a church and why we should love the church. We need to also talk about the painful reality, that there are so many people who once were here who are not here now. That some people have stopped because they have been wounded somehow. That some who are here and some who are not here have experienced deep wounds. Some of us have been wounded by words that have been spoken from pulpits like this one. When we have heard words that cut to the core of who we are. We have been wounded to the core by preachers or by words spoken by another congregant. Words that try to uphold a standard that none of us can live up to. Words saying we need to change, to be a different person than who we are. To change our race, the color of our skin or to change something about ourselves we cannot change. To try and fit in and live up to a standard that others say God calls us to. Words that have attacked us for who we are and who we love.

So just in case this is your story. Let me read you a poem. As many of you may know that I am a poet and wrote this poem for those who have felt rejected and judged by the world or by the church.

But before I read this poem I want us to participate in an little exercise. A mental imaginative exercise.

Let us imagine that we are in our favorite thrift store. You are in the very back of this favorite thrift store and are looking around. You find a bin and reach deep down within it. You pull out something. You pull out something that you realize you had a hand in making. Maybe it was something you crafted and maybe gave to someone. You look at it and you realize that it has not been cared for. It is torn and soiled and now discarded into this bin. You sent it out into the world and now it has come

back to you, and it is in terrible condition. Keep this in mind as I read you this poem called Abomination:

Abomination

Who has unraveled you?
Who has snipped and ripped
at your intricate strands
until the very fibers of your being hang
like cobwebs across the chasm
between the lies you have been told
and the truth of who you are?

Who slipped loose the yarn,
who has dropped all these stitches,
who undid all My good work?

Who hung you out to dry
beneath the merciless heat
of an oppressive sun,
until the vibrant brightness
and the rich depths
of the spectacular spectrum I gave you
have faded and greyed into the muted pallor
of an over-washed sock?

Who stripped out the colors,
who has denied you the promise
of My rainbow?

Who has soiled you?
Who ground into your soul the filthy fallacy
that I made you wrong,
so ruthlessly that you have begun to settle limply
into this matted, besmirched
state of existing?

Who slung the mud,
who wrote your name in dirt,
who infringed upon My trademark?

Who has discarded you?
Who has removed you from the honored place of display,
slipping you farther and further back

into the shadowed corners of the closet?

Who discounted your worth,
who miscalculated your value,
who diminished My treasure?

Who has done this abominable thing
to My good and perfect creation?

Show Mama who did this to you,
I will sort them out.

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Friends, I firmly believe that one of the reasons we chose to love the church is because these are places that are rich with potential. Where we can lovingly be inspired by the divine to be about the work of healing and remaking of each other. We can look upon each other week after week with all our complexities, with all the joys we come. We can recognize that we are not ten or fifty individuals, but we are family. We can be about this work together to be about reconciliation.

All of us are brought together. That is all of us. That is you too. This morning, wow this weekend, as we look at what happened yesterday, (the shooting that happened at the Trump Rally). One of the reasons we are at church, we are not here in spite of the fact that the world is baffling, and confusing, and at times violent. We are here because of those things. WE know the world. It can be violent. That violence can break out at any time. These are the places we don't just hold space, we make space for true genuine, truth speaking caring relationships. Knowing that each one of us is deeply loved. Where we experience authentic, loving relationships and welcome each other. Where we know that each other is fully and equally loved.

So those are some of the reasons why we love a church. But the title was "how to love a church". And that could be a much longer sermon.

The truth is I hope that when you leave today that you leave today, and you say "well I learned nothing" because you already know how to love a church. It is evident that you already know how to love a church. You have opened this space up to so many other organizations in the community. You have worked hard to be a community gathering space. If you talk to anyone on the street, even who have not come into the building, but you ask them about East Church and they have nothing but nice things to say. They share how they value and appreciate East Church being here; up to and including the way you feed your neighbors from the food pantry.

But just in case you need a reminder, let me share one last poem with you: Called How to love a church:

How to Love a Church

Wash your cup after coffee hour.

Greet a guest, join the choir,
teach the children.

Agree to serve on a committee.

Bring your talents, bring your energy,
bring your enthusiasm,
put your money in the plate,
show up for services,
show up.

Show up,
not because the doors are open
but because the invitation is open
to bring your whole self
to the gathering of selves
and dare to be challenged,
informed, inspired,
to be the one who challenges,
informs, inspires,
to be the presence that only you can bring
to the Beloved Community
in the tradition of the Spirit
of Love.

And love.
Do the hard stuff.
Stay in the room with the crying baby,
and with the adult who glares at the crying baby,
and with that person who gets on your last nerve.

Love the whole congregation,
stay in the conversation
even when you disagree,
especially when you disagree.,
Stay because you disagree,

and leave
because love can mean knowing
when to wipe the dust and go
when to say no.

And know within yourself
when you've been wrong,
when being strong feels more like bending,
like picking up the threads and mending,
like finding new instead of ending
and tending things you find surprising.

And find
to your surprise
that all the ways to love a church
are the same as all the ways to love yourself.

Greet a guest and show up,
be ready for the glow up,
you might even need to grow up,
proclaim your no, and sew up,
and wash
your own
damn
cup.

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