

Mark 13:1-3

Nov. 14, 2021 – Commitment Sunday

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, what makes a church a church?

Is it the building? The music? The liturgy? The pastor? The congregation?

Is it that the sacraments rightly administered and the word properly preached?

What makes a church the church?

As you know, today is our commitment Sunday. You are being asked to make a commitment, to say yes, to the ministry and mission of Peace in Christ. A church that is part of the Church.

You have been asked to – pray for our ministry and mission, to attend worship and Bible studies, to help out with the upkeep of the building, to serve on committees or the board, and to give financially to God through your offering so that God's ministry and mission can happen here among us.

You have been asked to help make Peace in Christ the church, led and gathered, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

Now, the word that we translate as church is ecclesia in Greek. It means the gathering of the faithful. And why do the faithful gather?

We gather so that we can hear God's word, receive the sacraments, and be empowered to go back out into the world to do God's mission, to bring the good news of God's love into every little nook and cranny of this world.

For the author of Hebrews, it was no different. The community gathered around the confession of hope so that they could be encouraged, and encourage one another to be Christ in the world for the sake of the world.

This ties in directly with the third article of the Creed – our belief in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gathers us into a community; strengthens us in the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; and then sends us back out into the world strengthened to do God's work.

God knows it can be discouraging out there, so God gifts us with the church where we meet together and encourage one another.

That's what a church is – a local gathering of faithful who come together and then go out again as individuals to be bearers of God's good news knowing that we are not alone.

That's what the church is. The universal commitment of all faithful people to be the good news in the world. That's our baptismal covenant and call.

When the first disciples walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem, they thought that that was what it was all about – the Temple - going to a building of stone in a specific place in order to make sacrifice. But Jesus' message to them, and us, is that sacrifice is to be made out in the world. Sacrifice is to be made wherever creation is suffering.

And so Jesus dies on the cross, is resurrected from the dead, and then sends us the Holy Spirit so that we can be empowered to make those sacrifices in the world – everywhere in the world. It's not about one place, Jerusalem, but every place, like right here in Elizabeth, all across Colorado, the whole US, and the entire world.

In Jerusalem, the disciples thought that the Temple, the building, would last forever, because it was so huge and impressive, but the only thing that is eternal is God. Buildings come and go. People come and go. But God is steadfast.

God cannot be destroyed, because God is the creator of all that exists.

Worshipping the created instead of the Creator is a trap we can easily fall into – that's why it is addressed in the first commandment – God is God and there is no other.

So, we give our time, talents, and possessions, which are God's finite gifts to us, so that we can be an active part of God's infinite ministry here and now.

God has invited us to be a part of God's mission to bring healing and wholeness to the world. God has gifted us with a community – Peace in Christ. And, God has gifted us with the universal Church – all believers from all times and all places.

We are not alone. We are part of a global and eternal team that just happens to meet right here and now.

This morning you are asked to say "yes" to this ministry and mission known as Peace in Christ. You are invited to join in our work together in whatever way you can. The church is a community, and it takes all of us to fulfill God's mission for us. There is no church without u.

The book of Hebrews was written during a time of persecution for Christians. Many followers had given up, because times were hard and Jesus had not returned in the flesh. Things aren't so different today. COVID19 has caused a lot of people to re-evaluate what's important in their lives.

The author of Hebrews argues that because Jesus went through the worst situation in his crucifixion, and he did that so we would have direct access to God, we should never give up. Confident in our covenant relationship with God, we are to follow Christ's example and live as he did – faithful, hopeful, loving, and patient in the face of all challenges.

And to help us with that, we've been given the Church where the Holy Spirit promises to meet us and encourage us. Every time we get together, Christ is here with us, dining with us in Holy Communion, setting God's example of love before us, and then becoming one with us, so that when we go out of these doors we can be his presence in the world.

And the world needs Christ's presence as much now as ever. The world needs Peace in Christ. So thank you for saying "Yes!" It takes all of us to do this good work.

It's not the size of the building or the community that matters, but the willingness of those who gather together to be led by the Holy Spirit in God's mission. Thanks be to God. Amen.