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Title: Jesus Said What!?!?

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Text: [Matthew 18:15-20](#)

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As a child, we went to church almost every Sunday. One of my earliest memories of church involves Cheerios. We didn't have Children's Sunday School or Children's Worship during the worship service, which we called "big church" back then. So, at an early age, I sat in "big church." To pass the time, my mom would give me a zip lock bag

full of Cheerios to eat during the worship service. I came to be able to judge the length of the service by the bag of Cheerios. If I still had Cheerios by the time the sermon ended, it meant it had been a good sermon which at the time meant, *a short sermon*. If all the Cheerios had been consumed and the sermon was still going, it was *not a good sermon*. That's when I knew it was going to be a *long* morning at church.

What are some of your earliest memories of church? For some, they may be very fond memories, memories that shape our faith and our lives, or of people who are still today a part of our lives. For some, they may be painful. Perhaps they are memories that drove you away from the church, memories that drove you away from faith for a period of time, and perhaps you are still wrestling with that pain. For others, perhaps your earliest memories of church are recent because you never really attended church until

Today we are concluding a sermon series called Jesus Said What!?!?, looking at some of the sayings of Jesus, sayings that took the original hearers by surprise, yet shaped their lives in some pretty amazing ways. Jesus did not talk about church very much. In fact, today's scripture text is one of only two places in the Gospels that mention the term church, the Greek word *ekklesia*.

Here, in the Gospel of Matthew, it appears that Jesus is talking about church discipline, dealing with disputes between church members, sort of a step by step. He's on to something bigger though, redefining the goals of relationships, how we care for one another in a spirit of humility, and our interdependence.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Matthew 18:18-20)

We've thought a lot about numbers in the last six months or so. The 8 minutes and 46 seconds that George Floyd couldn't breathe that has sparked months of protests and conversations around racism in the United States. 600, 400, 200 What is the right amount of money for those who are unemployed. Daily COVID-19 dashboards with the number of cases, the number of hospitalizations, the number of deaths. As our communities closed down and opened back up, we thought about how many people could gather in one place- 10, 25, 50, 100. Could a restaurant have 50% capacity or 25% capacity? What stage are we at? Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4.5? We've even had to consider how close we could safely be to another person- 6 feet.

We've thought *a lot* about numbers. In many respects, these numbers have served to shape, for better or for worse, what our communities look like. These numbers have served to shape what our common life together looks like. They have served to help us understand our interdependence with others. They have forced us to cast away the yoke of rugged individualism that has guided our lives. For some of us, that has not been hard. For some, it has been a very difficult approach to life.

Jesus has been thinking about numbers as well. In one of the two instances in the Gospels when he talks about the church, he describes, church, he describes the Christian community as "where 2 or 3 are gathered."

At first glance, it doesn't seem like Jesus has lofty aspirations for church attendance. Can you imagine this conversation, "pastor, how many people are you hoping for this Sunday at church? Oh, two or three." Now, you might ask, "how many do you hope to worship online this week? Oh, I hope two or three."

I used the word interdependence earlier. Interdependence- *the dependence of two or more people or things on each other*. At a second glance, Jesus points to an eternal truth about how God has designed the world. Jesus, as he always does, is pointing us to a bigger and deeper truth, a truth that is good news for all.

What is the church? What is the Christian community?

Is it a voluntary association of autonomous individuals or is the church a body?

Paul would use this image of the body to describe what Jesus is saying here *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)*

What makes this different than any other community you are a part of? We are a part of a lot of different communities right. Think about for a moment all of the different activities and groups you are a part of? It's a lot... just look at the back of cars around you and see how many different stickers and magnets people have on their cars. They all represent communities of which we are a part. Places or groups we give our time, our money, our passion.

Something has to make the church more than just a voluntary association, another group of which we are a part. It has to be something more in order for us to give our lives to it.

Jesus suggests that it is our connectedness, it is our interdependence on one another. Christian community is a community where the community is incomplete without the other, a place where the suffering of one is the suffering of all, a place where the joy of one is the joy of another.

When we enter into life together, we bind ourselves to one another with Christ as the head. The way we do community together is different than any other community.

That nature of our community is different- we are a people who are forgiven and forgiving, saturated in God's love and grace, so much so that we can risk being honest and real with another.

It's not that we are perfect and it's not that we will not experience conflict, rather it's how we model dealing with conflict, how we model reconciliation, how we bring about peace and togetherness in the community that stands out. It's how we are in relationship with one another and with the world that stands out.

I love what Robin Myers says about the nature of the Christian community. "It was not a conformity of belief that united them, not a hierarchy or creeds, rather it was the powerful confidence that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, that in that, God had changed everything." Robin Myers

You see, in the church, it's our community, it is our interdependence, it is the way that we do community, with Christ as the head, that frees us. Our dependence on God and one another, that frees us to be alive and to be God's people in the world.

Well, I still have some Cheerios left, so it's probably a good time to wrap up the sermon.

When Jesus said... where two or three are gathered he is there he is talking about a way of living life together. Being the church is not something we do, rather it is who we are. It's not just something we do on a Sunday, rather it is a promise that when we seek to live together the way that God calls us to that we are not alone. Christ is with us.

Will you pray with me?