

*Nazarene Essentials* Sermon #6

Chapters: “Our Ecclesiology,” “Our Polity,” “The Church: Local, District, and General,” “A Connected Church”

**Ecclesiology**

**Introduction**

Ponder this question as we begin our discussion today, “Why did you come to church?” Perhaps some are here for the coffee. Others perhaps are here for the music. Some are here for the educational small groups. Some of you are here for your children or youth. Some of you are here because you should come…because it’s the right thing to do. Some of you aren’t quite sure why you are here. Others are here because you are in the habit of coming. Maybe some of the children are here because parents or guardians point them in this direction. We hope everyone is here because you want to be here, but we know other motivations may be possible. There might even be some of you who are here to listen to this message!

Still others are here to worship the Lord with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, most of us are here for this reason today. We have been given an opportunity to call on the name of the Lord together and to enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit that results from worshiping Jesus. It is a blessed and sacred trust to be able link arms with fellow Christians and proclaim the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord together. To know that God has saved us. To know that He is leading us. To know that He provides for us, and to know that He has called us for His holy purpose. We bear witness to the love of God in Christ together. This is a special place with a special fellowship indeed. This is church. This is *ekklesia*. In our study groups, we will be discovering how this is realized throughout the Church of the Nazarene locally, in our region, and around the world. For us today, we will focus on our *ekklesia*, or our local church.

**I. The Early Church**

A. *Ekklesia* carries the understanding of an assembly, a group of citizens who have been “called out” for a specific gathering. In Greek times, the citizens of the city would be “called out” to an assembly by a messenger to deal with matters of public interest. These citizens enjoyed a particular privilege as they were able to vote in that assembly for matters of public trust. If you were not a citizen you could not vote and had no say in what happened in your particular community. If you were new to the community, or were a slave or a foreigner, you were not allowed to be a part of the assembly.

B. The early church understood this meaning of *ekklesia*. They understood that it was a special and sacred trust. What is interesting here is that the early church was not concerned with official status or stature as they found that their assembly gathered for a much greater purpose. In fact, it didn’t matter if you were rich or poor, or what your family heritage was. The only thing that mattered was that you had salvation in Christ. So the early church understood that *ekklesia* happened because everyone had gathered to worship Christ no matter what their background was. That was the intent of Paul’s words in Ephesians.

*Scripture:
Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)
Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household…*

That is what we are doing here today. We are an assembly of people with different backgrounds all finding our common place in the presence and power of the Spirit of Christ. *Ekklesia* always meant gathered people with a common cause in mind. That is community.
It must be noted here that without a common cause, community cannot take place.
**II. Our Church**
A. The Church of the Nazarene believes in community. We believe there is something special that happens when we leave our individualism and declare collectively our need for God. Consequently, church should never be the place where status matters. If we are concerned about ensuring that we look like we are happy, wealthy, and wise each Sunday, we have missed the reason for church. It isn’t about how great we are, it is about how broken we are before a Holy God. It is how He takes our brokenness, and in our midst, makes a beautiful collage of our lives for His glory.

B. Too often, however, we make church a stress point in our lives instead of a grace point. Too often, we focus in church on what divides instead of our common unity together. We have different preferences, different agendas, understandings, and different priorities. When we come together, we must lay individualism aside for the sake and cause of Christ.

Hurt feelings happen in “church” when at its assembly every citizen is consumed with their own desires. When this happens, we lose the sense of community.

That is what Jesus meant in John 5:44.
 *Scripture:*

*John 5:44 (NIV)*

*How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

C. As we come to church we don’t focus on who we are, we focus on who Christ is. We focus on how He wants to use us, how He wants to bring glory to His name through us. When we have the same desires each week as we worship together, real community happens. His Spirit fills us with His presence and love because we have:

* The Same passions
* The Same Involvement
* The Same Mission
* The Same Heart
* The Same Desires
* The Same Value on Life
* The Same value on Each Other
* The Same Value on Disagreements
* The Same Understanding of Truth
* The Same Understanding of Grace
* The Same Care for Each Other (Both in Sickness and in Sin – Galatians 6:6-5)

When these commonalities are realized, the result is a sense of belonging. Belonging, can be defined as a compelling desire to gather with others who share the same heartbeat and passion.

Can church ever become something we just do? Or just another activity or place we go? Absolutely! But it’s our responsibility to make sure, individually, we are living our lives in a manner that leads toward community, not away from it. So the result question is…

**III. How Do I Ensure I Have Community In My Life?***Scripture:
Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)
You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!*A. If I ensure that my mind is steadfast on Christ and His will and desires for my life. If I ensure that I am keeping a proper understanding of who I am and who Christ is. If I ensure that I strive to see others and the world the way Christ sees the world. If I fix my thoughts and heart on pleasing Him, I will be kept in perfect peace.

B. As I am kept in peace and as you share the same passion for serving Christ, you also are kept in perfect peace. As we are all kept in peace, His presence lives in our midst. Why? Because we choose to live with no hidden agendas or personal desires that block the move of His Spirit.

*Scripture:
Psalm 133:1 (NIV)
How good and pleasant it is*

 *when God’s people live together in unity!***Conclusion:**You are a part of this assembly, this congregation. Together we have been called out of the world to worship Christ, acknowledge His Lordship, and lay aside our self-interests for the sake of Christ. When we are all seeking those common goals, we experience the unity that the Lord desires for His Church and the peace that unity produces. Whether new to the faith or a seasoned believer, will you join with me in a prayer that the Holy Spirit will work in our hearts; and as we yield to Him, that he will help us to keep that unity in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)?

Let’s pray about these things together.