

Week 7 – Discovering the Church

Why the Church is important

The Church is the *people*, not the buildings they meet in. Every Christian is part of the one and only, world-wide Church. Belonging to the Church is very important.

- It is how Christians come together as a community, and support each other.
- It is where we worship God.
- It helps us to grow in understanding and faith.
- As the Church, we are a visible sign of God's presence in the world.
- The strength of the Church makes us able to fulfil our *mission*.

We can't do any of these things completely on our own. God wants us to be part of the huge, varied community that we call the Church.

The Church's Mission

- To share the good news (gospel) about Jesus with all people.
- To create a world where everyone can know and love God.
- To build a world where everyone is loved and cared for, fairly and fully, just as God wants them to be.

The beginning of the Church

The Bible describes what the Church was like right at the start – a perfect Christian community.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42, 44-47)

How the Church developed

With the massive expansion of the Church, more formal organisation and leadership was necessary. Over time, three main branches of the Church developed – Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant – with the Protestant churches comprising several denominations – Anglican, Methodist, Baptist etc.

All the churches agree about the essentials of the Christian faith, but they differ on some questions of interpretation and authority. Variety is helpful, but divisions can be harmful: the whole Christian Church is working towards greater unity, but it's a long, slow process.

The Church of England (Anglican Church)

Henry VIII established a separate Church of England, but it stayed close to the Roman Catholic tradition, even though it became a Protestant church. As a result, the Anglican Church probably has the greatest variety of worship and “feel” of any Protestant denomination – high/low, Catholic/Evangelical, and all shades in between.

Church Services

Regular worship helps us to keep God at the centre of our lives. The experience of God in Church on Sunday makes it much easier to experience God in the world on Monday.

The normal pattern for a Service includes:

- Praise and Thanksgiving
- Asking God for Forgiveness (Confession)
- The Word of God – Bible Readings, a Sermon, one of the Creeds
- Prayers for the Church and for the World (Intercessions)
- In Communion Services, a Eucharistic Prayer and the giving of Holy Communion
- A Conclusion and a Blessing.

Services at All Saints’ vary from informal and flexible (Family Service, Sunday Special) to traditional and atmospheric (Holy Communion, Morning Prayer). It’s good if you can enjoy both!

Four ways of belonging to the Church

- The ***Christian Church*** of all believers (called the ***universal*** or ***catholic*** church)
- The ***Church of England*** which provides the framework for our worship and church life
- The ***local church*** (All Saints’) where we worship, learn, serve, and give support to the Church’s mission (including financial support)
- ***Small groups*** where we can share experiences and develop close relationships more easily than in a large congregation

The Body of Christ

Paul describes the Church as “the Body of Christ”. Like parts of a single body, each member of the Church has their own special contribution to make. As examples, Paul gives leadership, prophecy, evangelism, faith, wisdom, knowledge, speaking, teaching, healing, caring, helping, giving – and cheerfulness!

What contribution might God be asking US to make?