

# **"Yours, Mine, Ours: The Church at Its Best"**

**John 15:9-17**

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Any day that you learn something is a good day. Have you noticed that? If you see something on television or read something in a book or magazine, maybe even in the Bible, you might learn something for the first time. You think, "This is a good day. I learned something that I didn't know before." That happened to me recently. I guess in one sense I knew it in my mind, but maybe I had forgotten it in my heart.

Some of you might have heard that a few weeks ago Dwight came to me before the early service and said, "The air conditioning is not working in the Chapel." I went downstairs with Dwight. The temperature at that time was about 76 degrees; I went down to check it again and it was up to 77. By the time people started coming in, it was about 78 degrees. It was obvious that we needed to come up here to meet. I was ready for the usual complaints about having to move up here, but after the service I was pleasantly surprised that not a single person complained. In fact, several people said, as they went out the door, "I really like it in the Sanctuary. I wish we could meet here all the time."

That got me to thinking. You may not realize this about me, but I am a real cheapskate, a tight wad. If I'm here in the church and I walk by a classroom and see lights on and there's no one in there, I go in and turn the lights off. You know those little pink phone message slips you can use to let someone know they missed a call? When I get one of those I don't throw it away, I save it and write on the

backside of it. Have you ever opened up a magazine and one of those subscriptions cards fall out? I save those and use them for note cards.

So, when people tell me they would rather meet in the sanctuary rather than the chapel, the wheels start to turn. I'm thinking about how many thousands of dollars we could save on utilities if we met in the sanctuary instead of the chapel. So the next Sunday I said, "We're going to make a decision about this and I need some feedback. If you will, let me know where you would rather meet." Again, after the service, everyone who came out who said something to me said, "I wish we could meet here in the sanctuary."

After the service was over and I finished shaking hands, I went down to the fellowship hall. A man and wife came up to me who attends the first service and said, "You know, you asked for some feedback. We would rather meet in the chapel, but whatever you decide will be fine with us. We'll be supportive of that." Isn't that a wonderful attitude? What I thought about that I had not thought about in exactly that way before, was "That attitude is the kind of attitude we need in the church." We need it in all of life, but especially in the church.

If you have ever been confronted with something in the church that you didn't agree with, you can be thankful for that. If we're are not doing things exactly the way you think we should, you can be thankful for that because, you know what it means? It's not your church! It's Christ's church. We all need to be reminded of that from time to time, don't we?

In the early church, it was true also. People forgot whose church it was. Did you hear the scripture Howard read? In the earliest church, the church at Corinth, Paul was concerned because there were divi-

sions. Some of you like Paul, some of you like Apollos, some like Cephas. In the *earliest* church at Corinth, Paul was concerned because there were divisions in the church. They had forgotten whose church it was.

Now, I believe in the basic goodness of all people. Even if you go into a prison and see someone who has done something pretty bad, I think there is still something good that can be redeemed in the worst of persons. I believe that every person has value, and that every single person is created in God's image. I believe also in the sinfulness of persons. Remember, I've been a minister in the church for almost 40 years, and if you're in the church for 40 years, you're around a lot of sinners. I've seen that sinfulness in myself. We are all created in God's image; there is goodness in each of us, but there is sinfulness in each of us. For some reason, it seems to stand out more in the church.

Later in the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Corinthians, Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper. He has commended them for some of the things they are doing, but then he says, "I don't commend you for this, I understand that some of you are coming early and eating and drinking and others are going hungry."

Let me ask you this. Have you ever been the last one in line at a covered dish dinner? Remember in the old days when people brought different dishes? There would usually be two or three different plates of fried chicken, and if you were the last one in line, you know what you saw on that plate? A plump, juicy back, or maybe a succulent, mouth-watering neck. It seems worse when we act that way in the church, doesn't it? Christ said "It is the one thing that will identify you

as my followers more than anything else.” More than anything else that you say or do—they way that you love each other, the way that you treat each other will say to the world, “You are my disciples.”

We’ve been talking about what we can do to advertise the church’s story. We’re not going to spend money the way Jim Glover Chevrolet does, but have you noticed the tag line on those commercials for Jim Glover Chevrolet? “Dad’ll do it.” Can you imagine Tom Rorschach and Mike Miller making a commercial for the church? That’s a scary thought, I know. Imagine that one of them plays Jesus and one of them plays someone who is going to be helped by Jesus. It would tough to decide whether you wanted Mike or Tom to play Jesus, wouldn’t it? The tag line for the commercial could be Jesus saying, “Dad’ll do it.” Our heavenly father will meet any need that you have. Dad’ll do it.

We say in the church there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism—one Lord! One Lord of the church. One of the best things it does is to remind us that the world does not revolve around us. There is one Lord. Do you remember in the movie, “Rudy,” a true story of a man named Rudy Ruettiger, who was trying to get into Notre Dame. He had applied several times and been denied admission. It was his last chance. He was running out of time. He went to visit a priest who had been especially supportive of him. Rudy asked, “Have I done everything I was supposed to do? Have a prayed enough? Is there anything you can do to help me?” The priest said, “After 30 years of studying theology, I’ve learned two things. First, there is a God, and second, I’m not him.” This is the Lord’s church. You know what? It’s not enough to say, “It’s the Lord’s church. It’s your church, Lord.” We need

also to say by the way we live our faith, "This is my church. I take pride in the fact that this is my church. I give it my time, talent and treasure. I do whatever I can to support the church because this is my church. I take responsibility for what the church does."

Sadly, how often have we seen people say, "Because this is my church, everything has to go my way." How often have you seen someone get upset at some little disagreement in the church and they're "out of here." Do you know why we never give up on church? We never give up on church because we have been chosen by Christ. Did you hear in the scripture, "You didn't choose me, I chose you." As Beverly said, for all the times when sides were chosen up, for the child who was the last to be chosen, that child knows that he or she is chosen by Jesus Christ. Chosen. We say we love because God first loved us; we choose because Christ first chose us. That's why we never give up on the church because we have been chosen to be the body of Christ in the world. We never give up on the church because of the joy we receive by being a part of the church. Jesus said, "I have said these things to you, I have given you these commands so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." Most of us don't like being commanded, do we? We sure don't like being told who we are supposed to love. Can you even be commanded to love? This kind of love you can. This kind of Christ-like love, Christ, the Lord of the church, can command of his followers. We hang in there with the church because of this joy.

The great theologian, Paul Tillich, lamented the fact that the church so often misses out on this joy. He said, "Is the reason for our lack of joy because we are Christians or because we are not Christian

enough? Is it because we have not been obedient enough to know the joy that Christ came to share with us?"

We hang in with the church because we know that it is more than just your church and my church. I hope you have received one of the new church directories. As you thumb through, you can see not only fellow church members, but brothers and sisters in Christ. This is *our* church, but it's not just our church, the people in here, but *our* church with God. We are not in this alone. God is with us. It's more even than just our church and God's church. Here's a Tulsa phone directory. There are people in here who don't have *any* church. They don't know that they could be a part of *our* church, and in so doing, it would become also *their* church. There's more than this.

We hang in there with the church because we are the friends of Jesus. Perhaps one of the most remarkable things that Jesus ever said was this: "I no longer call you servants. I call you my friends." He was talking to more than just the twelve. Time and time again I've told you this is not just a story about something that happened a long time ago, this is *our* story. The Living Christ says to us, "No longer do I call you servants, I call you friends."

In almost 40 years of ministry, the most devoted, caring, most loving group of people I have ever known was a Sunday School class at the church we served in Wichita Falls, called the "Friends of Jesus." This Sunday School class was made up of mentally retarded adults. Sunday after Sunday, rain or shine, hot or cold, good times, bad times, the "Friends of Jesus" were there. You could count on them. I hope that others will be able to count on us as much as the "Friends of Jesus." Amen.